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ROSE D'ALBRET

BY G. P. R. JAMES.



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SALT REGAL



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ROSE D'ALBRET

OR

TROUBLOUS TIMES

A Romance

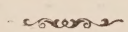
By G. P. R. JAMES, Esq.

AUTHOR OF "DARNLEY," "RICHELIEU," "MORLEY ERNSTEIN," ETC.



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P R E F A C E.

No lengthened preface is necessary to the following pages. The scene in which the events of the tale take place, and the time of action, both are extremely circumscribed; the former only extending over about forty square miles, the latter not comprising more than eight days. The work is therefore more like a drama than a romance; but I am inclined to believe that this will be found no disadvantage, where the circumstances naturally lead to the adoption of such a plan.

I doubt not that many of my readers, and amongst them some of the most amiable, will inquire, "Were there people ever so wicked as they are here represented?" Nor will they be the most ignorant who put this question; for, in this country especially, a great defect exists in historical writing. We have histories of wars and battles and political institutions; but we have few if any histories of society. We have histories of inventions, we have histories of arts; but we have no accurate tracing of the influence of institutions, discoveries, revolutions, and struggles upon the general mind and character of nations. Such a history, though it would be one of the most interesting, as well as the most instructive, still remains to be written in our language.

If the reader, however, will take the trouble of looking into the memoirs of the times spoken of in these pages, he will find that the men and women of that epoch were worse—far worse than any of the persons here depicted—that corruption was more general, vice more daring, selfishness even less restrained. The only incidents in the story which may be called romantic, are facts upon record. That with which the work opens is well known; and, in regard to the means employed to force an innocent girl into a marriage with a man whom she detested, I need only say that the same were adopted in a noble family of the south of France towards the year 1587, with circumstances of violence and licentiousness which I have not thought fit to introduce into this tale, and unhappily with success.

The work has been written a long time; and in reading it over, after having had occasion to study the subject deeply for other objects, I feel that I can safely put it forth as a tolerably correct picture of the state of society, in the country and the period to which it refers.

ROSE D'ALBRET;

OR,

TROUBLOUS TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

THE WRONGS OF WOMAN IN 1590.

WHATEVER effect the institution of Chivalry might have upon the manners and customs of the people of Europe; however much it might mitigate the rudeness of the middle ages, and soften the character of nations just emerging from barbarism, there was one point which it left untouched by its softening influence, and which remained, till within a few years of the present period, as a case of great hardship upon those who are supposed to have benefited more particularly by the rise of chivalrous feeling. Women, to whose defence the knights of old devoted their swords: women, for whose honour and renown so many a gallant champion has shed his blood: women, for whose love so many wars have been kindled and so many deeds done, were, till within a short period of the present day, mere slaves in those matters where their own happiness was concerned. Their influence, it is true, might be great over the heart and mind, but in person, at least till after their marriage, they were simply bondswomen; they ruled without power even over themselves, and had no authority whatsoever in those transactions which were of the most importance to them.

Where parents were living—although even then it was thought scarcely necessary to consult a young woman upon the disposal of her own hand—yet we may suppose that parental affection might occasionally enable her to exercise some influence, however small, in the acceptance or rejection of a lover. But where the parents were dead, she had for many centuries, especially in France, no voice whatever in the matter, and was consigned, often against her inclination, to the arms of one whom perhaps she had

never seen, whom she often regarded with indifference, and often with hate. It is little to be wondered at that such a state of things produced gross immorality. The first act of a young woman's life, the act alone by which she obtained comparative freedom, being one by which all the fine and delicate sensibilities, planted by God in the female heart, were violated at once—it is little to be wondered at, I say, that the vows by which men endeavoured to supply the place of principles, should be violated likewise at the voice of inclination.

The fault, however, was in the feudal system; and the manner in which lands were first acquired in Europe, produced regulations for their transmission which generated the greatest social evils—from the consequences of which indeed we are not yet altogether free. Each feof was required to be held by a man who could do service to his sovereign in the field; and, consequently, when any vassal or vavasour died, leaving behind him one or more daughters, the law required that the feof should be managed by a guardian till such time as, by marriage, the heiress or heiresses could present men to do homage for their lands, and perform military service to the superior lord. Thus, an heiress could not marry without her lord's approbation; and by the constitutions of St. Louis it was enacted, that, even where a daughter was left under the care of her mother, the lord might require security that she should not form an alliance without his consent; and the good king, in the rule which he lays down for the choice of a husband for a ward, directs the guardian simply, if there be two or three who offer, to take the richest.

As the feudal system declined in France, however, the power of the lord over his vassals of course diminished, and long before the end of the sixteenth century it was but little exercised by one nobleman over another. In cases where large inheritance fell

to daughters, their marriages were made up in their own families; and though they themselves had, in general, as little choice allowed them as ever, yet their own relations were the persons who selected the future companions of their life. Thus fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, had all far more to do with the marriage than the person whose weal or woe was to be affected by it.

When a father died, however, leaving his daughter to the care of a guardian, he transmitted to him the great power he himself possessed; and if the young lady were the heiress of great wealth, it generally happened that the person selected for her husband was a son or near relation of her guardian. Very often, indeed, her hand was made a matter of merchandise and sold to the best bidder, so that the guardianship of an heiress was not unfrequently a profitable speculation.

During the last half of the sixteenth century, indeed, almost all these rules and regulations were broken through, in the midst of the civil contentions which then existed in France; and we find several instances, even in the highest ranks of society, of children marrying against the will of their parents, when an opportunity was afforded them of escaping parental rule. Such was the case with the daughter of the Duke of Montpensier; but in this, as in many other instances, religious differences had their share, and the principle of liberty, which rose with the Protestant religion, affected even the relations of domestic life. To guard against the opportunities thus afforded, by the troubles of the times, for ladies to choose as they thought fit, many very violent and tyrannical acts were committed; and, on the other hand, where power could venture to outstep the law, shameful breaches of right and justice took place to get possession of the person of an heiress, who was looked upon and treated by all parties merely as the chief title-deed of the estate. Thus the celebrated Duke of Mayenne himself carried off by force out of Guyenne, from the care of her own mother, Mademoiselle de Caumont, in order to marry her to one of his own sons, though she had been already contracted to another person from the very cradle.

Such a strange state of things was further complicated by the rights of the monarch to certain privileges of guardianship, known by the name of *gardes nobles*, by which he was entitled, by himself or his officers, to take into his charge the estates and persons of certain orphans under age; and, according to the corrupt practices of the times, the tutelage of the royal wards, in particular

provinces, was often made a matter of merchandise, and still more frequently was bestowed upon unworthy persons, and obtained by the most corrupt means.

To all these complicated and evil arrangements must be added another custom of those times, which perhaps was devised for the purpose of obviating some of the bad consequences of the existing state of things. I allude to the habit of affiancing at a very early period. Sometimes this engagement between the children of two noble houses was confirmed by every ceremony which could render the act inviolable in the eyes of the Church and the eyes of the law: sometimes, however, a less solemn compact was entered into by the parents, subject to certain conditions, and these were frequently rescinded, changed, or modified, according to circumstances. In many instances the heiress of a noble house was left by a dying parent to the guardianship of a friend, under contract to marry that friend's heir on arriving at a fixed period of life; and in such circumstances, whatever might be her inclination to break this engagement, when her reason or her heart led her towards another union, she would have found it very difficult to escape from the trammels imposed upon her, even to take shelter within the walls of a convent.

It has seemed necessary to give these explanations in this introductory chapter, that the reader may clearly understand the circumstances of the parties in the following tale; and I shall only further add, that at the time when the history is supposed to commence, a long period of strife and confusion had thrown the country into a state of anarchy, in which law was daily set at defiance, even for the pettiest objects; every evil passion found indulgence under the shield of faction; the most violent, the most unjust, and the most criminal proceedings took place in every part of the realm; might made right throughout the country; and the bigoted priesthood were generally found ready to assist in any dark plot or cunning scheme, where the interests of their patrons might be served, or the objects of their own order advanced.

At the same time, though tranquillity was in no degree recovered, everything was tending to its restoration. Henry III., who had sanctioned, instigated, or committed every sort of crime, had fallen under the knife of the assassin. Henri Quatre was daily strengthening his tottering throne by victory, clemency, and policy. The battle of Arques had been fought and won, and the king, with a small but veteran and gallant army, had advanced towards the capital and was besieging the town of Dreux.

CHAPTER II.

THE PURSUIT AND RESCUE.

On the confines of Normandy, towards that part of Maine which joins the Orleanois, and nearly on a straight line between Mortagne and Orleans, lies a track of wild common land, unfit for cultivation. It is now covered with low bushes, stunted trees, gorse, fern, and brushwood, though often presenting patches of short grass, which serve as pasture-ground for the sheep and cattle of the neighbouring villages, which are few and far between.

The extent of this somewhat dreary district is about five miles in one direction and six in another, and it is broken by hill and dale, deep pits and quarries, rushy pools and swamps, over which at night hovers the will-o'-the-wisp, while every now and then a tall beech or wide-spreading oak attests the existence in former days of an extensive forest, now only traditional. On one of the hills towards Chartres appear the ruins of an old castle, which, though not referrible to any very remote period, must have been a place of some strength; and below is a little hamlet, with a small church, containing several curious monuments, where knights are seen stretched in well sculptured armour, and leaguers, in starched ruffs and slashed pourpoints, lie recumbent in grey stone.

Here, however, in times not very long gone, stretched one of those forests for which France was once famous, though the woods had been cut down some years before the Revolution, and, converted into gold, had furnished many a luxurious banquet, or been spent in revelry and ostentation. It never, indeed, was very extensive, when compared with many of the forests that surrounded it, but still, towards the end of the sixteenth century, it possessed scenes of wild beauty rarely to be met with, and some of the finest trees in the country. Through a portion of the wood ran one of the many windings of the river Huisne; and the ground being hilly, as I have said, from the principal eminences the winding course of that stream might be discovered for several miles, while here and there many a château, or *maison forte*, appeared in sight, filled with branches of the families of Sourdis, Estrées, Chazeul, de Harault, Liancourt, and others.

One or two village spires also graced the scene, but the eye could catch no town of any great magnitude, which was probably one of the reasons why that district had suffered less severely during the wars of the League than almost any other in France. Several causes, however, had combined to obtain for it this happy immunity. No

Protestants were to be found in the immediate neighbourhood, and though all the gentlemen possessing property on the banks of the river were steady Catholics, yet they were in general attached to the cause of order and loyalty, and, while withheld by a feeling of bigotry from supporting in arms a monarch whom they considered a heretic, were unwilling to give the slightest aid to a faction, which they well knew had anything at heart but the maintenance of a religion which they used as a pretext for rebellion.

Thus the tide of war had rolled up the valleys of the Seine and the Loire; Orleans had been a scene of strife and bloodshed; Alençon had been taken and retaken more than once; Dreux and Chartres had seen armies frequently under their walls; but the tract I speak of, with the country round for several miles, had escaped the scourge of civil contention, and a truce, or convention, existed amongst the noblemen of that part of the country, by virtue of which each enjoyed his own in peace with his neighbours, and feared little the approach of hostile armies, as the ground was unfavourable to military evolutions; and nothing was to be obtained by marching through a country where no wealthy cities afforded an object either to cupidity or ambition.

When any great event was imminent, indeed, and the fortunes of France seemed to hang upon the result of an approaching battle, small bands of armed men hurrying up to join this force or that, would cross the district, carefully watched by the retainers of the different lords in the vicinity of the forest in order to prevent any outrage, and often the little village church would be thronged with soldiery, who in a few days after left their bones upon some bloody field; or at other times the wild hymns of the Huguenots would rise up at nightfall from the woodlands, in a strain of strange and scarcely earthly harmony. Then, too, in the open field, the Calvinistic preacher would harangue his stern and determined brethren in language full of fiery enthusiasm, and often the Roman Catholic peasant would pause to listen, and go away almost convinced that the traditions to which he had so long clung were all false and superstitious.

Few acts of violence, however, were heard of; and when any of the many bands of plunderers, who, taking advantage of the anarchy of the times, scoured the country, pillaging and oppressing both parties alike, appeared in the woods and fields, the gentry, making common cause against them, soon drove them out to carry on their lawless trade elsewhere. Some severe acts of retribution, too, had been practised on those who

were taken, and sometimes for weeks the old oaks were decorated with the acorns of Tristan the Hermit, as a warning to others of the same class to avoid the dangerous vicinity.

It was not wonderful, therefore, that, on a cold, clear day, of the frosty spring of the year 159—, a stout, homely man, about forty years of age, dressed in a plain brown peasant's coat, with a black cloak and large riding boots, should ride along upon a strong bay horse, apparently quite at his ease, though night was not far distant. His dress and his whole appearance bespoke him a farmer well-to-do in the world; but farmers in those days were not above any of the acts required by their calling; and over the crupper of the horse was thrown a large sack of corn, either for sale or for provender.

I have said that the good peasant appeared quite at his ease, and so indeed he was, utterly unconscious of danger; but that did not imply that he went unprepared for defence, for those were times when such precautions had become habitual with all men. The very labourer went to the field with pike, or large knife, or arquebuse, if he could get it, and the good man we speak of had a long, broad, straight sword, with iron hilt and clasps, by his side, and two pistols at his saddle-bow. He was a strong, and seemingly an active man, too, though of no very bulky proportions, and somewhat short in stature; and there was an air of determination and vigour about him which would have made a single opponent think twice before he attacked him. Moreover, his countenance displayed a good deal of cool, self-possessed *nonchalance*, if I may be permitted for once to use a foreign word, which showed that he was not one to sell either his corn or his life very cheap, and he rode his horse like one well accustomed to its back, and who found no difficulty in managing it at his will.

The evening, though, as I have said, very cold, was beautifully clear; the western sky was all gold and sunshine; the blades of grass and the leaves that still hung upon the branches—which, like the ungrateful world, had cast off so many of their green companions in the dull moment of adversity—were all white with frost, and the road, though somewhat sandy in its materials, was as hard as adamant.

With a quick habitual motion of the eyes, the farmer glanced from right to left, marking everything around him as he advanced, and once, where the scene was more open and unencumbered with trees, halted for an instant and looked round. He still showed the careless confidence of his heart by humming from time to time snatches of a common

song of the day, and once or twice laughed lightly at some thoughts which were passing in his own mind. His features were good, though somewhat too strongly marked, his eyes bright and clear, his complexion ruddy with health and exposure, and his limbs well knit and strong from labour and hard exercise.

At length the worthy man, trotting on at no very quick pace, began to descend the side of one of the hills of the forest and entered a sort of wild dell, where small broken spots of turf were interspersed with clumps of younger trees, principally ashes and elms, while the older tenants of the wood hung upon the slopes higher up. At the bottom was a small stream of very clear water, flowing on towards the Huisne, through water-cresses and other plants of the brook, but now nearly frozen over, though towards the mid-course the quickness of the current, and perhaps the depth from which the fountain rose at no great distance, kept the water free from ice. A little wooden bridge spanned it over, leaving room for two horses abreast, but the old and congealed ruts at the side showed that the carts, which occasionally came along the road, passed through the stream itself; and some vehicle which had traversed the valley not long before had so far broken away the frozen surface of the rivulet, that the traveller had clear space to let his horse drink, before he crossed the bridge.

As he paused to do so, however, and slackened his rein for that purpose, he gazed round, and his eyes were quickly attracted by the sight of some objects *not* very pleasant to contemplate for a wayfarer in those days. About two hundred yards farther down the stream sat a party of some eight or nine men, with their horses tied by the foot, and feeding on the frosty grass as well as they could. Though the number was so small, a cornet, or ensign of a troop of cavalry, rested against a tree, for the ground was too hard to plant it in the earth in the usual manner; and the steel caps, corsets, and arms which each man bore, plainly showed the farmer that one of the wandering bands of soldiery, who were constantly marching hither and thither, to plunder or to fight, as the case might be, was now before him.

From the force they seemed to muster, the good farmer at once concluded that such an inefficient body was more likely to be engaged in a marauding expedition than in a march to join either the army of the king or the Duke of Mayenne; but the green and red scarfs which they wore evinced that, when engaged in regular military operations, it was to the party of the latter they were attached, though the district in which they now were generally favoured the Royal cause.

However, as he himself, whatever his private opinions might be, bore no distinctive signs of either faction about him, the traveller hoped that he might be suffered to pass unmolested, especially as his dress and appearance offered no great show of wealth; and, therefore, without displaying the slightest concern or apprehension, he suffered his horse to conclude his draught, and then was preparing to resume his journey, when, after a brief consultation, one of the soldiers advanced at a quick pace on foot, and planted himself on the opposite side of the bridge, while another ran higher up the hill, and the rest rose slowly from the ground, and began to untie their horses.

All these movements were remarked by the traveller; but still he maintained his air of easy carelessness, till the soldier who had placed himself opposite advanced a step or two towards him, exclaiming, in an impatient tone, as if irritated by his apathy, "*Qui vive?*"

The farmer was not without his reply, however, though, to say "Long live the king," which he might be inclined to do, would have been a dangerous experiment, and he therefore replied, without the least hesitation, "*Vive la France!*"

"Come, come, master peasant, that will not do," exclaimed the other, advancing upon him, pistol in hand; "thou art some accursed *Politie*! Are you for the Holy Union or Henry of Bourbon?"

"Nay, good sir, do not be angry," replied the farmer; "I am a poor man of no party. I have nothing to do with these matters at present, and I mind only my own concerns."

"If thou art of no party," said the soldier, "thou art an enemy to both. So, get off thy horse; I have a fancy for him."

"Nay, I pray you," cried the other, "do not take my beast. How am I to carry my corn?"

"We will save you that trouble," rejoined the soldier, with the courtesy usual on such occasions; "and if you have any weight of gold upon you, we will deliver you of that burden also. So, get off your horse at once, Master What's-your-name, or I will send you off with a pistol-shot."

"My name is Chasseron," answered the peasant, "and a name well-known for wronging no man; but if I must get off and part with my poor beast, I pray you help me down with the corn, for I cannot dismount till it is away. But if you will leave me the nag," he added, "I will pay you his full value, if you will come to my place. He and I have been old friends, and I would fain not part with him."

"Get down! get down!" cried the soldier impatiently. "Clumsy boor, can't you

dismount with a sack behind you?" and at the same moment he came nearer and laid his hand upon the load.

The instant he did so, the farmer thrust his strong hand between his cuirass and his neck, half strangling him with his large knuckles; and with his right drawing a pistol from his saddlebow, he brought the muzzle close to his ear, exclaiming, "Now, master, I see you have some command, by your scarf. So if the way be not cleared very speedily, you shall go up or down as the case may be, without any brains in your skull. I've got one life under my fist, and they can but take one in return, so now we shall see how they love you. Don't struggle or you shall soon struggle no more; but turn round, tell them to get out of the way, and then march on with me to the top of the hill."

"I can't turn," said the soldier, in a rueful tone.

"Oh, then, I'll turn you," answered Chasseron with a laugh; and without quitting his hold, he whirled his adversary round with prodigious strength, lifting him nearly off the ground as he did so. "Now drop your pistol," he continued. "Drop it this instant!"

The man did so; and, touching his horse gently with his heel, the stout farmer put him into a slow walk, while several of the marauders ran forward to see what was going on.

"Bid them back!" cried Chasseron, jogging his companion's head with the muzzle of his weapon. "Bid them back, or you are a dead man, without shrift."

"Keep off! keep off, Beauvois," cried his adversary. "Keep off, La Motte, or by the Holy Virgin he will kill me!"

"That I will," muttered Chasseron heartily; and the soldiers halted for an instant as if to consult. But your good companion of those days was not very careful of a comrade's life; and it seemed to be soon agreed that the insolence of the farmer was not to be tolerated out of any consideration for the gentleman in his hands. There was, therefore, some cocking of pistols and looking at pans, with various other indications of coming strife.

Chasseron, however, continued to advance, dragging his captive along, and keeping a watchful eye upon all the proceedings of the enemy, while the poor fellow in his hands shouted again and again to the hard ears of his companions to hold back for God's sake. They on their part paid little attention to his petitions; and, in a moment or two, several of the soldiers began to creep closer, in order to get within pistol-shot, while the rest mounted their horses as if to make an attack on the rear of the enemy. No sooner had the foremost of those on foot

reached a fitting distance, than he began to take a deliberate aim at the horseman; but the latter, muttering to himself, "This is unpleasant, Pardie!" turned suddenly towards him, withdrew the pistol from the ear of the fellow whom he held, levelled it at the other, and fired. The man went down in a moment, his weapon discharging itself in the air as he fell.

At the same time the captive struggled hard in the hands of Chasseron, and, by a sudden effort, grasped his dagger to stab him before he could resist. But the farmer was still quicker in his movements, his other pistol was drawn in an instant and once more at his friend's head, and while two shots from the enemy passed close to him, one grazing his arm, the other going through his hat, he exclaimed, "Throw down the *dague*, or you are a dead man!"

The order was obeyed in an instant; but it was repeated with regard to the sword, which was also cast to the ground at a word; and then to the surprise of the Leaguer, he was instantly set free.

"Now," cried Chasseron, "I give you your life. Run back as hard as you can to your comrades; and, if you have any command over them, bid them leave off attacking a man who never did them any harm."

His prisoner required not two biddings to take to his heels; and the good farmer, setting spurs to his horse, galloped up the hill as hard as he could go, while the men who had mounted pursued him, at full speed, firing at him as he went, and the soldier, who had at first ran on upon the road, cast himself in the way, prepared to stop his advance.

As it was now a flight and pursuit, one moment was a matter of life and death to the farmer; and as he rode on upon the enemy before him, he levelled his remaining pistol and fired. Though now at full speed, his aim was not less true than before; but the ball striking his adversary's steel cap in an oblique direction, glanced off without wounding him, and the soldier fired in turn without effect. Drawing his sword, the farmer galloped on; but he had to do with a resolute and powerful opponent in the man who barred the way; the others were coming up at a furious pace, and the life of poor Master Chasseron was in no light peril, when suddenly a party of four horsemen, well mounted and armed, appeared on the top of the hill, riding quickly, as if attracted by the report of the firearms.

Now they might be friends, or they might be enemies; but Chasseron determined to look upon them as the former, till they proved themselves otherwise; and, waving his hand towards them, he cried, "Help!

help! Hurrah!" and, as his antagonist in front turned to see who they were, he let fall a blow on his cap, which brought him on his knee. The farmer was obliged instantly to wheel, however, to defend himself against those who followed; and with wonderful strength and agility he crossed swords with one, threw his discharged pistol at the face of another, knocking out some of his front teeth, and watched a third, who was somewhat behind.

However unequal might be the combat, he maintained it gallantly, while the appearance of the fresh party, now galloping down at full speed, made his enemies hesitate in their operations. Nor was the cry of "Vive le Roi!" which came from the advancing cavaliers, nor the sight of the white scarfs with which they were decorated, calculated to reassure the Leaguers. The men who had remained below on foot, however, now rushed up; and, withdrawing from the attack upon the farmer to meet the more honourable adversaries who were by this time close upon them, they attempted to give some little array to their front, and to recharge their pistols.

But before this could be done, the newcomers were amongst them; Chasseron turned to give his powerful aid; white scarfs and green were mingled together in a moment; and, after a brief struggle, the Leaguers were driven down into the valley with the loss of two of their number. After attempting to make a stand at the bridge they were put to flight; and springing from their horses, the men who had mounted followed the example of those on foot, and took refuge in the wood, whither the victors did not think fit to pursue them. As soon as it was clear that resistance had ceased, the successful party halted by the stream, surrounding the good peasant with whom the strife began; while he, on his part, hat in hand, thanked them heartily for his deliverance.

"Parbleu!" he exclaimed, "if you had not come up, monsieur, I should have lost my wheat and my money too. I had killed one of them, and might have got the better of two more; but I do not think I could have managed all the seven."

These words were addressed to a young gentleman apparently not more than one or two and twenty years of age. His complexion was pale but clear; his eyes dark and thoughtful; his deep brown hair waving from under his hat, for he wore no defensive arms, and his short beard curling round his mouth and chin. All the features of his face were remarkably fine and delicate, but the forehead was broad and high, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His whole air, and the expression of his countenance, were grave and thoughtful; and although he had led

the others in their charge with gallant determination, yet it had been with calm coolness which displayed not the slightest sign of vehemence or emotion. The quick-eyed farmer had remarked also that he had contented himself with driving back the enemy, and defending his own person, without striking at any one or using the pistols with which his saddlebow was garnished. In person he was tall and well made, though neither much above the ordinary height, nor apparently particularly robust. His carriage, however, was graceful; and he sat his horse with ease and power, managing it during the combat as if well accustomed to the tilt-yard if not to the battle-field, and drawing it suddenly up by the side of the stream when he saw that the other party had betaken themselves to the wood.

To the address of the good countryman he replied briefly, saying, "You are very welcome, my good sir; though I am not fond of such affairs, nor much habituated to them. Neither are you, I should suppose; and yet you seem to have defended yourself skilfully and vigorously. Are you not hurt?"

"Not a whit!" answered the farmer; "and as to defending myself, that's an old trade of mine; I have borne arms in my day, though I have given that occupation up for the present; but there is many a man in the army remembers Michael Chasseron. I did not wish to hurt any one, if they would have let me pass quietly; so what they have got is their own fault. And now we may as well see to their baggage: there may be curious things amongst it."

"That you may do if you like," replied the young gentleman; "neither I nor my servants can have anything to do with plunder."

"Nor I either," answered the farmer; "I am always content with my own, if I could but get it; but these good men may have other things upon them besides gold and silver. Papers, young gentleman, papers which may be serviceable to the king; and for those, by your good leave, I will look, begging you to stand by me for a minute or two, lest our friends come out from their hiding-places again."

"Willingly, willingly," said his companion, "that is a laudable object, and in that we will help you." Thus saying he dismounted himself, and bidding two of the servants do the same, proceeded with Chasseron to search the bodies of those who had fallen, three horses which remained tied to a tree, and some baggage which had been left on the ground where the Leaguers had been sitting.

In a small leather bag buckled on the back of one of the chargers, was found a packet

of letters and papers regarding the movements of various bodies of men, which the good farmer examined with a curious eye. He then handed them to the young gentleman, who had come down to his assistance, saying, "You had better take them to the king, sir."

"Nay," replied the stranger, "take them yourself, my good friend; I am not going to the camp; and if this intelligence be of importance you may get rewarded."

The farmer shook his head, laughing. "His Majesty," he said, "has scarcely money, I hear, to buy himself a dinner. But I will take them, for if I don't go myself, I will ensure that he gets them; and now let us look at that fellow I cut over the head upon the hill; if we leave him there, he will be frozen to death to-night, and that would be scarce Christian."

On approaching the spot where the man lay, they found him still alive, though bleeding and stunned by the blow he had received. After some consultation they took him up and placed him across one of the Leaguers' horses; and Chasseron then laid his hand upon his brow, saying thoughtfully, "Where shall we take him? The nearest place is Marzay, M. de Liancourt's château; but I don't rightly know whether they will give me shelter there for the night; and this business has stopped me so, that I shall not be able to get to Marolles before dark."

"Oh, I will answer for your welcome, my good friend," replied the young gentleman. "I am going to Marzay myself; M. de Liancourt is my uncle."

"Well then, we will come along," replied the farmer, mounting his horse again; and, the wounded man being given into the charge of one of the gentleman's servants, they rode on up the hill, Chasseron keeping in front with the leader of the party.

After they had gone about two hundred yards at a slow pace, the farmer turned towards his companion, who had fallen into a silent reverie, and looking in his face for a moment, he said, "I could almost swear I have seen you somewhere before; but yet I know that can't be, for it is some fifteen years ago."

"I must have been a child, then," replied the cavalier, "for I have yet to see three-and-twenty."

"It was your father, I suppose," continued Chasseron, "he was then a young man, and you are as like him as one leaf on a tree is to another."

"What might be his name?" asked the stranger, with a faint smile; "give me that and I will soon tell you if it was my father."

"That is easily done," replied the farmer, "his name was Louis de la Grange, Baron

de Montigni. He was a good soldier and a good man."

"You are right," said the young gentleman; "such was my father's name, and such was his character; but he has been dead now more than ten years."

"Ah, so I heard," answered Chasseron; "we must all die, and the great reaper generally takes the best ears, and leaves the worthless ones standing. I am glad to see his son, however. But how comes it, sir, that you are not with the king? Many a man younger than you fought at Arques, I believe."

"That is not improbable," replied De Montigni; "but my uncle sent me to Padua to study, and laid his injunctions on me to remain there. Neither, to say the truth, did I feel much inclination to take part in all this strife, at least so long as the present king was in arms against his sovereign."

"Parbleu! I do not see how he could help it," cried Chasseron; "if he could not believe the Catholic doctrines, and they held a dagger to his throat and bade him swear he did believe them, he had but one choice, either to tell a lie, or knock the dagger out of their hands."

"I do not blame him," replied the young nobleman, "and for that very reason I felt unwilling either to take arms for my king or against him. Besides, I have friends on both sides, am not very fond of shedding blood, and, to tell the truth, my friend, I found better society amongst the dead than amongst the living. I mean—"

"Oh, I understand what you mean," answered the farmer: "you mean you loved your books better than hard blows."

The young gentleman's cheek grew somewhat red; "I am not afraid of blows," he said, "and I think you have had no occasion to suppose so."

"Pardie, no!" replied Chasseron frankly; "and I should not blame you if you were. I am a very peaceable man myself, when men will let me alone; and I desire nothing but to enjoy my own in tranquillity; so if you could find peace at Padua with Horace, and Cicero, and Virgil, you were quite right to take it."

"You seem to know something of such studies," said the young Baron de Montigni with a smile.

"Oh, yes," replied Chasseron; "I see you judge by externals alone, my young friend; and because I am here a poor cultivator of the soil, you think that I am a mere peasant; but I am of gentle blood like yourself—hold my own land, what is left of it; and your friend Virgil should have taught you that there is no degradation in agriculture; so that, though I have for a time beaten my

sword into a reaping-hook, I am not a bit the worse gentleman for that."

"Nay, God forbid," replied the young gentleman, "I hold it one of the most honourable employments a man can follow; but you must not censure me for seeking occupation in my books, as you say, while you seek occupation in your fields."

"There is some difference, however," replied Chasseron; "in living with the dead as you say, you cut yourself off from doing good to the living, which ought to be the great object of each man's life. You may tell me, that amongst those great men, those sages of antiquity, you can best learn how to live, and gain precepts to be applied to your future conduct; but there is a danger in being too long a learner; and, in studying precepts all your life, you may forget ever to apply them. Each man has duties, and those of busy times like these are active ones. One's king, one's country, one's friends, one's relations, one's fellow-citizens, all have claims upon us which the dead have not; and the exercise of our abilities affords lessons for our conduct, to which all the maxims of philosophers and moralists are but bubbles."

"Methinks," replied De Montigni, "that the cultivator of the soil is not much more called into active life than the cultivator of letters."

"Your pardon, your pardon, worthy sir," answered the farmer; "he is always mingling with his fellow-creatures; he is ever ready to take his part with the rest when need shall be; he is daily benefiting mankind, and not spending his life in studying how; he is still learning more, even while he is enacting much; and, by the practice of what is right, he learns to do it well."

The young gentleman smiled gaily, but changed the subject, saying, "Perhaps you are right; but now tell me, as you seem to have studied all these things deeply, and most likely have lived with your eyes open to all that has taken place, what has been doing here of late, and what is the real state of France? for but imperfect and maimed accounts reach us in foreign lands, perverted by the prejudices of men, and coloured by all the passions of the relaters. Nor have I indeed paid much attention to what I heard, till I was summoned back by my uncle; for the only tidings that reached us, came through the League, except once or twice, when some Royalists passed by Venice."

"Your question is a wide one," replied Chasseron, "and I should have to write a history to tell you. It is but needful to say, that France is growing tired of the League; men are recovering from the fever which had driven them mad. The king, now with

many, now with few, is still gaining ground on his enemies; but his friends are sometimes more mischievous to him than his foes. Half the Catholics serve him coldly, intrigue in his very camp, his court, and at his table, because he is a heretic. The Huguenots murmur and complain because he is obliged to buy, bribe, and reward their adversaries. Both fight well when there is a battle or a siege, but both are well inclined to leave him when he is obliged to spend his time in those slow and difficult movements, which are no less necessary in a campaign than the combat or the storming party. In the meanwhile, fed with foreign gold, supported by foreign troops, confederated with the implacable enemies of the land, and slaughtering Frenchmen with the swords of the Spaniard, the only hold which the League have upon the people of France is the frail pretext of religion, the almost incurable anarchy into which they have thrown the country, and the possession of a number of towns and fortresses, lands, governments, and territories, which those who have grasped them are unwilling to resign, and know they can only retain so long as this great serpent of the League remains uncrushed."

"But let me hear," rejoined the young baron, "if you can tell me, why, when the king had Paris at his mercy, he did not make himself master of it. If I have been informed aright, he could have taken it in an hour?"

"Perhaps he might," replied Chasseron, "and yet he did not. I think it was very foolish of him, for my part; but still there would have been terrible bloodshed, many thousands of good citizens would have perished, the capital would have been a scene of slaughter, violence, and devastation, such as the world has seldom witnessed. After all, perhaps it is as well for a king not to do all that a king can do; and yet the Parisians deserved no great mercy at his hands. But he, poor foolish man, chose rather to wander about fighting here and fighting there, sleeping hard, sometimes half starved, and working day and night, than take their beds from under these rebellious citizens, or give their wives and daughters up to his soldiers."

"And he was right," cried Montigni warmly, "and God will bless him for it. If I am not much mistaken, that act will set him firmly on the throne of France."

"Perhaps so," said the farmer, "but old soldiers get hardened to such things, and men do marvel and grumble too, that when he could have terminated this long and desolating war by one bold and severe stroke, he should have hesitated for the sake of the most rebellious race in France. There is

much to be said on either side, and I am inclined to think myself that the king was wrong, though I was of a different opinion at the time."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his young companion, "what has made you change your views so quickly then?"

"Thought," answered the farmer, "thought, which may be as often the comrade of the soldier in the camp or on the march, or of the farmer in the field, if he likes to seek it, as of the pale student over his book. No man need be without thought; and the active man, the man of life and movement, acquires often a power of rapid but no less certain calculation, which the slow ponderer of the cabinet can never gain. I now believe, Monsieur de Montigni, upon further consideration, that though there might have been much bloodshed in the streets of Paris, had it been taken when it was besieged, though even the Catholic soldiers would have been difficult to restrain, and the Huguenots would have remembered St. Bartholomew, yet the amount of slaughter will be greater—nay, perhaps has been greater already, by the protraction of the war, than if Henry had blown the gates open, and let his army into the heart of the capital."

"It was an amiable weakness, if it was one," replied De Montigni; "but see, what a splendid scene we are coming upon, while the evening sun pours such a flood of purple over the grey waves of the wintry forest."

"Ay, indeed, it is a lovely land, this France," said Chasseron, "and rich as it is lovely, if men would but be content to enjoy the bounties which God gives, without carving out for themselves miseries and contentions which frustrate all the benevolent purposes of the Most High. Who that looks over such a prospect as that would think that, in every village and in every field, in the wood and in the plain, is strife and bloodshed, anarchy and crime, sown by the virulent passions and intolerant bigotry of those for whose especial blessing such glories were created? Out upon it! It almost makes one a misanthrope. However, there stands Marzay, not half a mile distant, with people walking on the ramparts. Who may they be, I wonder?"

"I can divine without seeing their faces," answered the young baron; "there are the garments of a lady, and a priest's robes, and a pourpoint, on the gold lace of which the sun's setting rays are glistening. They are sweet Rose d'Albret, daughter of the Count de Marennes, who was killed at Poitiers, and good father Walter de la Tremblade; and either my uncle, De Liancourt, or the good old commander, or, more likely still, my cousin Chazeul."

"Well," rejoined Chasseron, after a short pause, "I trust to your warranty, Monsieur de Montigni; for I am not very sure that my having killed a Leaguer or two will be my best recommendation; no, nor, *ventre saint gris*, your white scarf the surest passport to favour in Marzay. Your uncle is one of those we call *Politics*, who are more afraid to espouse openly a cause they know to be just, than the Leaguers to uphold one they know to be unjust; and, as for Monsieur de Chazeul, why he is one of the pillars of the Holy Union."

"I'll be your surety," replied De Montigni, who was beginning to take no slight pleasure in the conversation of his frank companion. "They shall give you a hearty welcome, or I will hardly take one for myself, which they would not like; so never fear."

"Nay, I fear not," answered his companion drily; and they accordingly rode on towards the gates, which lay straight before them.

De Montigni, however, fell into a fit of deep musing as they approached, and bent his eyes steadfastly upon the ground, though the persons who were walking on the ramparts above stopped as he drew near, and a fair lady waved her hand as if in welcome.

CHAPTER III.

ROSE D'ALBRET.

By the reader's good leave, we must go up for a moment or two to the ramparts of the Château of Marzay, and introduce him to the party there, before the new-comers arrive. Nay, more, we must return for nearly an hour, and listen to the conversation which was taking place while all the events we have just narrated were occurring in the wood that lay beneath the eyes of those upon the castle walls, though it must be premised, that those events had been completely hidden from their sight by the thin veil of forest boughs; as the various turns of fate, upon which the fortunes of our whole future life depend, are often going on close by us, concealed from our gaze, whether anxious or unconscious, by the ripple of an idle current of trifling things that affect us not permanently in any way.

The Baron de Montigni, though five or six years had elapsed since he last saw any of the party there assembled, had, by his previous knowledge of the circumstances, divined aright the names of the persons of which it was composed. About an hour and a half before sunset, a very beautiful girl of

eighteen or nineteen had come forth upon the walls for her afternoon walk, having on one hand a gentleman dressed in the height of the extravagant fashions of the day, with a high starched ruff, or *fraise*, as it was called, which made his head look like that of John the Baptist in a charger, and with a slashed and laced pourpoint of yellow velvet, stiffly embroidered with silver. His shoes were of white satin, enriched with a rosette of yellow; and in his girdle hung a small dagger knife, with a fretted hilt of gold, while far behind hung his sword, as if put out of reach of his hand lest he should use it too frequently. His beard was pointed, and neatly trimmed; his hair curled, and turned back from his face; and on the top of his head he wore a small velvet toque, with a single long feather. In person he was tall, and not ungraceful, though somewhat stiff; and his features were all good, though there was certainly something in the disposition of them which gave a sinister and unpleasant expression to his countenance. Perhaps this effect was produced by the closeness of the eyes and the narrowness of the brows, which produced a shrewd and confined look, though his face might otherwise have been prepossessing.

Though dressed with such scrupulous care, his air and manner was not that of a fop. It was not easy and unrestrained, indeed, but it was bold and confident; and if one might judge—as we almost all do judge—from manner and appearance, pride, rather than vanity, was his prevailing folly; shrewd ambition, rather than levity, the characteristic vice. Yet, as we shall see, he was not without lightness, too; but it was often used in those days as a means to an end; and covered too frequently intense selfishness under an air of idle indifference.

On the other side of the young lady walked, to and fro with her upon the rampart, a man considerably passed the middle age, dressed in the habit of the clergy. His hair was almost white, though here and there a streak of a darker hue showed that it had been once jet black. His features were fine, though apparently worn with care and thought; and the expression of his countenance was grave, calm, and almost stern. His large dark eyes were, indeed, full of light, but it was not of that kind which illuminates what is within for the gaze of others, but it rather fell dazzling upon those who were his companions for the time, searching the secrets of their hearts, and displaying none of his own. His lips were thin and pale; his cheek delicate and hollow, but with a slight tinge of red, which by its varying intensity, from time to time gave the only indication to be obtained of strong emotions in his bosom.

But we must speak of the lady, for truly she deserves some notice, were it but for her beauty. There were, however, other things to be remarked in her besides the fine and delicate features, the graceful and rounded limbs, the bright complexion, the fair skin, the tangles of her luxuriant dark brown hair, the heaving bosom, or the perfect symmetry of the neck and shoulders. In the large, soft hazel eyes, under their jetty fringes, on the warm arching lips, and in the dimple of the cheek, shone forth a gay and bright spirit, which, perhaps, under some circumstances might have been full of playful jest and light-hearted merriment; but, as it was, the light was subdued and shaded almost to sad thoughtfulness. It seemed as if cares and anxieties, if not sorrows and misfortunes, had come upon her young; or as if those with whom her early years had been spent, had laboured to repress, rather than moderate, the joyous buoyancy of youth, and had brought a cloud over the sunshine of girlhood.

It was not exactly so, indeed; but living in troublous times, when the mind became familiar with great but tragic acts, and every day brought some subject for deep and anxious thought, and passing her life in comparative seclusion with people older than herself, not very wise nor very considerate, though not actually domineering and austere, her cheerfulness had been repressed, though not extinguished, and a shade of sadness brought over her demeanour, rendering it various and changeful like an April day. Her dress was rich and tasteful, according to the fashion of the times, but more in the style of the fair and unhappy queen of Scotland, than of the harsh and masculine Elizabeth. There were no gaudy colours; indeed there was no great display of embroidery; but the lace which waved over her fair bosom and rose round her snowy neck, was of the finest and most costly kind; and the black velvet of her dress was here and there looped with pearls.

When first she came forth, by a door that led over a small bridge to the inner parts of the dwelling, she paused at the edge of the wall for a moment, and gazed over the scene around. Youth is generally more fond of contemplating nature's handiwork than age. Mature life is usually spent in dealing with man and man's acts; the face of nature comes upon us then as an impression rather than a subject of contemplation. To the young, it is full of interest and of wonder; imagination robes it in her own garmenture of light, peoples each shady dell, fills the forest with her own creations, and calls up in each village or church or tower a wild and agitated throng of feelings and sensations, of hopes and fears, all the beings of the fancy,

ephemeral though bright, confused though lively, impalpable though vivid. Youth sees more than the landscape—age sees it as it is; the one has its own sunshine, to adorn all it looks upon; the other views everything under the shady cloud.

Rose d'Albret stopped to gaze; then, notwithstanding the chilliness of the wintry air, she turned her eyes to the east over the gray lines, where the vanguard of the night was marching forward over the sky, and then looked round to the west, where the rear of the day was all glittering with golden light. What made her sigh? what made her fix her eyes upon a thin white film of mist that rose up from the deeper parts of the forest, like the smoke of a heath-burner's fire? Who can say? who can trace along the magic chain of association, link by link, and tell how the objects within her sight connected themselves in her mind with her own situation, and made her remember that she had much to regret?

"You are thoughtful to-night, Rose," said the Marquis de Chazeul.

"And may a woman never be thoughtful, Chazeul?" asked Rose d'Albret. "If such be your creed, pray seek another wife, for you will often find me so, I assure you."

"Nay," replied Chazeul, "I would not disappoint you so for the world, sweet Rose; it would break your little heart if I were to take you at your word."

"No, indeed," replied the young lady, with perfect calmness; "you are quite mistaken, Chazeul, my heart is not so easily broken; and, as for disappointment, it would be none at all; I am in that happy state, that, whatever be the event, I can bear it with calmness."

"Or, at all events, with affected indifference," replied her companion, a little nettled; "is it not so, Rose?"

"Not at all," she answered; "you never saw me affect anything that I did not feel. Here is father Walter, who has known me as long and better than yourself, can witness for me. Did you ever see me pretend to anything that is not real, Monsieur de la Tremblade?"

"Never, my dear child," replied the priest; "and I should think Monsieur de Chazeul should be very well content to see you willing to give your hand to him according to your guardian's commands. In the first place, it shows that obedient disposition, on which so much of a husband's happiness depends; and in the next place, it leaves him the sweet task of teaching you to love him."

"That is, if he can," said Rose d'Albret, with a smile; "but do you know, my good father," she continued. "I would draw

another inference from the facts, which is simply this, that it would be better for Monsieur de Chazeul to give me longer time to learn that same lesson of love, and not to press forward this same marriage so hastily."

"Nay, on my life," answered Chazeul, "it is Monsieur de Liancourt's doing, not mine; but I will acknowledge, sweet Rose, that my eagerness to possess so fair a flower may make me anxious to gather it without delay, though my impatience may make me prick my fingers with the thorns, as I have done just now."

"Well, I am in the hands of others," said Rose d'Albret; "I have nothing to do but to obey; and doubtless, in hurrying this matter forward, my guardian does what he thinks best for me."

"He may have many reasons, dear daughter," said the priest; "he is old; times are troublesome and dangerous; none can tell what a day may bring forth; and it is a part of his duty to see you married and under the protection of a younger and more active man than himself, before he is called to quit this busy scene."

"Oh, I think, good father, I could protect myself," replied Rose d'Albret. "Those thorns my cousin De Chazeul talks of, would be quite hedge enough, I should imagine—but hark, there are guns in the wood—and there again!"

All listened, and two or three more shots were distinctly heard.

"I thought we had a truce here?" said Rose d'Albret.

"True, amongst ourselves," answered the Marquis de Chazeul; "but we cannot get others always to observe it; and 'tis not unlikely that these are a party of Henry de Bourbon's heretic soldiers wandering about, and committing some of their usual acts of violence and plunder. He is now besieging Dreux, I find."

"Why, I have always heard," said Rose d'Albret, "that the king is strict and scrupulous in restraining his soldiers from such excesses."

"The king?" exclaimed Chazeul, with his lip curling. "Pray call him some other name, sweet Rose. He may be a king of heretics, but he is no king of mine, nor of any other Catholics."

"Hush, hush!" cried Walter de la Tremblade, "you must not let Monsieur de Liancourt hear you make such rash speeches. He acknowledges him as king of right, though not in fact—his religion being the only bar."

"And that an insurmountable one," said the marquis; "if he were to profess himself converted to-morrow, who would believe him? I am sure not I."

"Nay, cousin," replied Rose d'Albret, "one who is so frank and free, so true to all men, so strict a keeper of his word as the king is reported to be, would never falsify the truth in that. Remember, too, I am his humble cousin; for the counts of Marennes come from the same stock as the old kings of Navarre."

"Ay, a hundred degrees removed," said Chazeul; "I have no fear, dear Rose, of your blood being contaminated by his."

"Well, it matters not," replied Rose d'Albret, with a laugh; "I intend to fall in love with him whenever I see him."

"It might be better," observed Chazeul, "to try that with your husband."

"Oh no," cried his fair companion gaily; "that would be quite contrary to all rule, Chazeul, especially amongst the ladies and gentlemen of the League. As far as I have heard, they have done away with all such foolish old customs; and loyalty to their king, or love between husband and wife are amongst the errors of the past, which they quite repudiate." Chazeul bit his lip, and she went on, "I should like to see this king, he is so gallant and so noble, I am sure I should love him—is he very handsome, Monsieur de Chazeul?"

"I never saw him, mademoiselle," answered the marquis, somewhat bitterly, "except at such a distance that one could discover nothing but the white plume in his hat, and on his horse's head."

"I have seen him often, long ago," said the priest, "when he was a mere youth, at the court of the queen mother; and then he was as handsome a boy as ever my eyes lighted upon, with a skin so delicately soft, and such a warm colour in his cheek, one would have thought him little fitted for the rough, laborious, and perilous life he has since led."

"Hark! there are guns again," exclaimed Rose d'Albret; and a sudden cloud came over her brow. "I hope these people," she continued, after a moment's pause, "are not attacking my cousin, De Montigni."

"They will soon make an end of him if they do," said Chazeul; "at least I should suppose so."

"You seem very indifferent to the matter," observed the lady quickly; "why do you imagine so?"

"Simply because a book-read student, who has been passing the best part of his life within the walls of a college, can be no match for men of courage and of action," replied Chazeul.

"Fie," replied Rose d'Albret warmly; "Louis de Montigni has as much courage as any one. I can remember him before he went abroad, a wild, rash boy, who used to

frighten me by the daring things he did. But if you had any kindness in your nature, Chazeul, you would go out to help him—in case it be he who is attacked. He must be on the road even now; I wonder he is not arrived."

"I will go and speak with Monsieur de Liancourt about it," replied Chazeul; and, leaving the priest and the lady together, he retired for a short time from the walls.

"Let us listen," said Rose d'Albret; and, leaning her arm upon the stone-work, she turned her ear towards the wood, bending down her bright eyes upon the ground, while the priest advanced, and standing beside her gazed at her for a moment, and then looked out over the country beyond.

During the whole conversation which had taken place, he had watched her closely; and, well acquainted with her character from infancy, he had read aright all that was passing in her mind. He saw that the coldness which she displayed towards the man selected for her future husband was no assumed indifference, none of that coquettish excitement which many a woman learns too early to administer to the passion of a favoured lover, none of that holding back which is intended to lead forward, none of that reluctance which is affected but to be overcome. He perceived clearly enough that she was indifferent to him, and perhaps somewhat more; that she felt for him no respect—but little esteem; and, though accustomed for some years to his society from time to time, and habituated to look upon her marriage with him as an act that was to be, that she now began to feel repugnance as the time approached for performing the contract, which had been entered into by others without her knowledge or consent. In short, he saw that though she would obey, it would be unwillingly.

The priest regretted that it was so; for he felt no slight affection towards her, though, as too often happens, he was ready to do all he could, from other considerations, to promote a sacrifice which might destroy the happiness of one he loved almost as a child. The knowledge that she was indifferent towards Chazeul might grieve him, but it did not in the least induce him to pause in the course he had determined to pursue; and he proceeded after a few minutes given to thought, to draw forth her sentiments further, while at the same time, he endeavoured to work some change in her opinions.

"He is certainly very handsome," said the priest abruptly; "do you not think so?"

"Who?" cried Rose d'Albret, with a start. "Oh, Chazeul! Yes, perhaps he is; and yet not handsome either."

"Indeed," said Walter de la Tremblade, "I think I never saw finer features or a more graceful form."

"No, not graceful, surely," said the young lady. "Well-proportioned, perhaps, and his features are all good, it is true; but yet, father, there is something that makes him not handsome."

"What?" asked the priest.

"Nay, I cannot well tell," answered Made-moiselle d'Albret; "perhaps it is that his eyes are too close together—but I was thinking of De Montigni, good father; I hope no mischance has befallen him."

"Oh, I trust not!" answered her companion. "And so, Rose, this is the only fault you can find with your lover's beauty, that his eyes are too close together! I can assure you, sweet lady, that the fair dames of Paris do not perceive that defect, and that you may have some trouble to keep the heart you have won."

"I wish—" said Rose d'Albret, but then she broke off suddenly, leaving the sentence unconcluded, and beginning again afresh, she added, "Heaven knows, good father, that I took no pains to win his love; and, perhaps the best way to retain it when I am his wife, if ever that happens, will be to take no pains to keep it."

"It will then be a duty to take pains," answered the priest, somewhat sternly; "we are not born, my daughter, in this life, to seek nothing but our own pleasure and happiness. We are here to fulfil the important tasks assigned us by the Almighty, and clearly pointed out to us by the circumstances in which we are placed. To neglect them is sinful, to perform them coldly is reprehensible; and it is our greatest wisdom, as well as our strictest duty, to labour that our inclinations may go hand in hand with the performance of that which God has given us to do."

"Nay," said Rose, laying her hand gently on the sleeve of his gown, "you speak severely, good father. I do not see how it is so clearly pointed out that I should marry Nicholas de Chazeul; and I do wish that the ceremony were not hurried in this way. However, if I do wed him, depend upon it, I shall follow your counsel, and do my best to love him. At all events," she added, raising her head somewhat proudly, "you may be sure that under no circumstance will I forget what is due to him and to myself. I may be an unhappy wife, but I will never be a bad one."

"That I doubt not, that I doubt not," said the priest warmly; "but what I wish to point out to you is, the way to happiness, daughter; and depend upon it, you can but find it in doing your duty cheerfully."

"I know it, my excellent friend," an-

swered Rose, "and it shall be my endeavour so to act ; but I could much desire before I take a vow to love anyone, that I had some better means of knowing how far I can fulfil it."

"Oh ! if you have the will to do so," answered father Walter, "it may easily be done."

"What !" she cried eagerly, "easy to love a man one cannot esteem or respect ! I say not that such is the case in the present instance, father," she continued, seeing her companion fix his eyes upon her with a look of surprise and inquiry ; "I only state a case that might be. Suppose I were to find him cold, selfish, heartless, cruel, vicious, base, how should I love him then ?"

"But Monsieur de Chazeul is none of these," rejoined the priest.

"I say not that he is," answered Rose d'Albret ; "I only say he may be for aught I know. I knew him not in youth ; and in manhood I have seen him twice or thrice a year in circles where all men wear a mask. I would fain see him with his face bare, good father."

"Few women ever so see their lovers," rejoined the priest ; "love is the greatest of all hypocrites."

"Perhaps that is true," said Rose ; "yet time, if a woman's eyes be unblinded by her own feelings, does generally, soon or late, draw back the covering of the heart, so far as to show her some of the features. I have seen little : I would see more ; for what I have seen makes me doubt."

"Indeed !" exclaimed her companion, "what have you perceived to raise suspicions ? Some casual word, some slight jest, I warrant you ; such as he spoke just now about his cousin. Idle words, daughter ! idle words, upon which you must put no harsh interpretation."

"How often idle words betray the spirit within !" said Rose. "They are the careless jailers which let the prisoner forth out of his secret dungeon. They have cost many a king his crown, if history be true ; many a woman reputation, ay, and perhaps many a lover his lady's hand. But what I wish is to hear more than idle words, to see more than a masked face ; and, I do beseech you, aid me to delay this marriage for a time. Why was I not told earlier ? Why was all arranged without my knowledge ? Louis de Montigni has been summoned back more than a month, and yet I have had but one week, one poor week, allowed me to prepare my thoughts, to nerve my heart for the great change of woman's existence. Marriage, to man, is but a pageant, a ball, a festival. To us, it is one of the sole events. It is birth or death to woman. I do beseech you, father, if you have ever loved me, if you have watched

over my youth, counselled me rightly, enlightened and instructed my mind, led me on in honour, virtue, faith—I do beseech you, aid me but to delay this ceremony. I feel not rightly here," and she laid her hand upon her bosom.

"I cannot promise to do so, my sweet child," replied the priest. "The marriage is decided ; your guardian's word is given ; and I cannot but think it may be well for all, that the final seal be put to the engagement as soon as may be."

"Do you ?" said Mademoiselle d'Albret ; but there she stopped, for at that moment Chazeul appeared again at a little distance ; and Walter de la Tremblade advanced towards him. The next moment, however, she murmured to herself, "They have gained him ; and I am alone !"

A change came over her from that instant, and when, after speaking a word together, the other two rejoined her, she was cheerful if not gay.

"The count declares it is some loose party stealing the deer," said Chazeul, as he approached ; "and thought it needless to send out to see, as, in these days, when one can hardly secure the corn of one's fields, or the fruits of one's vineyard, it were a vain hope to keep the game of one's woods."

"Well, he knows best," replied Rose d'Albret ; "and now, good cousin of Chazeul, do tell me, what is to be the fate of France ? How often is your great friend the duke to be defeated, before he succeeds in crushing heresy, excluding the king from the throne, and putting some one on that thorny seat instead ?"

"He will be defeated, as you term it, no more, fair lady," answered the marquis ; "for if reports be true, he is even now marching against Henry of Bourbon with a force that shall crush him and his apostates, as men tread down an ants' nest."

"Indeed ?" asked his fair companion ; "then there will be a battle soon ?"

"Within three days, men think," replied Chazeul.

"And of course you will be present ?" said Rose d'Albret.

But the colour rose in her lover's cheek while he replied, "Nay, I cannot quit my bride and give up my bridal for any cause."

"True ! men would say it was an ungallant gallantry," she replied ; "and yet ladies love heroic acts, I have heard. God help us ! We women, I believe, but little know what we would have."

"That is very true," said the priest ; "and, therefore, fair daughter, it is wisely arranged that others should decide for them."

"Perhaps so," answered the lady ; "but one thing is certain, they would do so, whether it were better for us or not."

They then walked on once or twice along the whole range of the rampart without speaking, each seemingly busy with thoughts which they did not choose to utter; till at length the lady resumed the conversation on a new theme: "Methinks, cousin of Chazeul, the court in its days of splendour must have been a gay place."

"It was, indeed," replied the marquis, glad of a subject which enabled him to speak more freely; "I know nought so brilliant on the face of the earth as was the court of Henry of Valois, some five years before his death; but I trust ere long we shall see a monarch who will hold as bright a one, without displaying his weaknesses; and then I trust Rose de Chazeul will shine amongst the very first in splendour, and in beauty."

"I am determined," she answered, with a smile, "if ever I appear at the court, to have a coronet of diamonds fashioned into roses, to bear out my name."

"Oh, trust to me," cried Chazeul, "trust to me, to find devices which shall make you outshine the queen."

"Ha! there come a party over the hills," cried Mademoiselle d'Albret. "It is De Montigni, I am sure;" and running forward to the edge of the rampart, she looked forth; but, as she did so, she murmured, "Do they think to buy and sell me for a goldsmith's toy?"

Her two companions joined her in a moment; and, as the party approached, she waved her hand as we have before related, gaily beckoning her cousin. He did not raise his eyes, however; and with an air of some mortification, she said, "He will not look up!"

"He is bashful," said Chazeul; "too much study makes but a timid gentleman."

"So they say," replied Rose d'Albret; "but let us in and meet him at all events."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE CHÂTEAU.

THERE was an old hall in the Château de Marzay, very like many another old hall in many parts both of France and England, some forty feet in span, some seventy in length, arched over with a concave roof, nearly semicircular in the curve, and not at all unlike, with its rounded ribs, the tilt of an enormous waggon. From the line where the vault sprang from the walls, ten or twelve large beams projected, ornamented at

the ends with curiously carved and somewhat grotesque heads, supporting each an upright, upon which the arches of the roof rested, while diagonal beams gave additional strength to this sort of permanent scaffolding. The floor, as was usual in such chambers, was of polished tiles, alternately octangular and square; and seven large windows, with very small panes set in lead, gave light to the interior.

This hall was the favourite place, in all the castle, of its lord, Anthony Lefevre, Count de Liancourt, a gentleman allied to some of the first families in France, who had served in former wars with tolerable reputation, showing a greater lack of judgment than of courage; the latter quality leading him into many dangers, from which he had been saved, more by the skill and resolution of his friends and followers, than his own discretion. Comparatively few of the vices of man do not spring from his weaknesses. It is still the contest between the stronger and the feeble parts of our nature which overthrows us; and whether the passion be vanity or pride or avarice or ambition, or any of all the host of minor fiends against which we pray, it is solely by weakness of the higher qualities, placed to guard the heart in opposition to them, that either or all gain the ascendancy. We do not have a care to fortify the garrison betimes, as we might do, and the enemy takes us by siege, or storm, or escalade.

The Count de Liancourt had been all his life a weak man, and the passion which triumphed the most frequently over him was vanity; but he had sufficient talent, which is very far from incompatible with weakness, to conceal from the eyes of those who did not know him to the very heart, the feebleness of his character. The suggestions of other people he passed for the result of his own deliberations, and he adhered to these adopted children with all the fondness of a parent. Though naturally wavering and undecided, he had the skill to give a colouring of moderation and prudence to that conduct which sprang from hesitation; and, by adopting the reasonings of wiser men, he justified that course which in him was the result of unreasonable doubts. But as he was wanting in discrimination of justice, right, and propriety, it not unfrequently happened that the very art with which he covered the fact that he followed rather than led, turned to his discredit; and acts by no means honourable to him were very generally ascribed to his own cunning, which were in truth only attributable to his own weakness. Without giving the whole history of his life, these facts could not have been made manifest by any other means than by description, and therefore I have thought fit to point out some

peculiarities in a character which would not probably have room to develop itself.

He loved, I have said, that old hall, and would pass many an hour there, either walking to and fro—apparently in deep thought, but in reality more engaged in day-dreams than meditations—or in writing or reading at a table in one of the windows, while ever and anon he raised his eyes to the banners and ensigns which hung from the beams, and contemplated with pleasure the long ancestral line of which they were mementoes.

In this hall he was found by his fair ward, Rose d'Albret, and her two companions, on their return from the battlements; but the lady had to place her hand upon his arm before he roused himself from a book which he seemed studying deeply.

"De Montigni has just arrived, my dear uncle," said Rose, as he looked up; "we saw him from the walls."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the count; "I knew no harm would happen to him. Ah, here he comes!"

As he spoke, the young nobleman entered the hall, followed by the good farmer Chaseron; and Monsieur de Liancourt advancing towards him, opened his arms and embraced him with every mark of kindness.

"Welcome! welcome, my dear boy!" he said, in a somewhat pompous tone; "welcome back to Marzay. You will find the old château just as it was, though your uncle cannot boast of bearing his years as well, Louis. Here are your gay cousin, Chazeul, and my fair ward Rose, all ready to receive you, and wish you joy of your return. Why, you look somewhat thin and pale!"

Chazeul embraced De Montigni also, and congratulated him upon his safe arrival in his native land, adding, "You have been no great traveller, I think, nevertheless, Louis. Padua has been your boundary, has it not? And there, doubtless, you have made yourself a very learned man, while we here have learned nothing but hard blows and rough campaigns. By my faith, you have, I think, chosen the better part, at least the happier one; though here is a fair reward for all one's labours. Sweet Rose, do you not welcome your cousin?"

The cheek of Rose d'Albret grew somewhat red, partly through indignation, partly through embarrassment. She saw clearly enough the latent design of the Marquis de Chazeul in speaking of her as if she were actually his; and she felt some anger at being called forward to welcome the companion of her youth, as if she were not prompt to do so, by a man who had shown such indifference to his safety. She came forward gracefully, however, and held out

her hand to De Montigni, with a warm and kindly smile, saying, "Indeed, I am very glad to see you, Louis; but you would take no notice of me just now. I waved my hand to you from the walls, to be the first to wish you joy on your return, but you did not look up."

De Montigni coloured, and faltered for a moment, but then replied earnestly, "I saw you from a distance, and knew you at once; but as I came near, a thousand memories of other days assailed me, Mademoiselle d'Albret. Days long gone rose up before me, hopes vanished, pleasures past away, regrets unavailing; and I could not but give myself up to thought."

Rose asked herself what were the hopes, what the regrets, he spoke of; and her heart beat, and her cheek grew somewhat pale. She looked round, however; Chazeul was talking in a whisper with her guardian; the priest was standing in the window; and she said, in a low voice, "Do not call me Mademoiselle d'Albret, Louis. That is a cold name. It used ever to be Rose, or cousin, in former days."

"Cousin you are not, except by courtesy," replied De Montigni, in the same tone, "and I did not venture to call you Rose, now that you are another's."

The colour came warmly into her cheek, but she cast down her eyes, saying, in a tone scarcely audible, "I am not another's yet; and, if ever I am, I shall then be your cousin really."

De Montigni knew little of the world, it is true; but yet when a woman speaks of such matters, in so low a tone, to one for whom she professes friendship, it shows at least a confidence in him, which is near akin to deeper regard. He was embarrassed, however; and how many opportunities does not embarrassment cause us to lose for ever! how often does it make us seem the very reverse of what we are! The kind appear harsh, the affectionate cold, the modest even impudent. He knew not what to reply; and suddenly breaking off their private conversation, though it might have lasted longer, for his uncle was still talking eagerly with Chazeul, he turned to his companion Chaseron, who, standing a step behind, had remained unnoticed, watching with his clear and penetrating eyes all that was passing before him, and drawing at once his own conclusions.

"My dear uncle," said the young nobleman, addressing Monsieur de Liancourt, "here is a worthy gentleman to whom I have promised a welcome for the night in your name. I found him in the wood about half an hour ago, attacked by some six or seven marauders, two of whom he had disabled before I came up."

"Ay, sir," rejoined Chasseron, "and if you had not come up and fought gallantly when you did come, the rest would have soon disabled me. To your courage and skill I owe my life, *pardie!*"

"Indeed!" cried Rose d'Albret, with her cheek glowing and her eyes turned somewhat reproachfully towards Chazeul, "I told you I was sure Louis was attacked, and that the guns we heard were those of some of these plunderers. I knew De Montigni was coming at that hour," she added as a sort of explanation, "and thought it very likely that he would meet with some lawless band in the wood."

"It was in my defence, fair lady, that he fought," said Chasseron, "and gallantly he did fight, too."

"And pray, sir, who are you?" demanded Chazeul, with an angry spot upon his cheek at hearing the praises of one whom he wished to believe weak and timid.

"A very poor gentleman, sir," replied Chasseron, "not many poorer in the realm of France; and yet a gentleman. My name is Michael de Chasseron; and in days of yore, I have seen many a well stricken field; so that I am some judge of such matters, though now I have laid aside that trade, and am, as you may see, but a cultivator of the ground."

"Michael de Chasseron! I have heard the name," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "at all events you are welcome, sir; and such entertainment as the Château of Marzay can afford you shall command."

Chasseron was expressing his thanks briefly, when a loud, rough-toned but hearty voice was heard without, exclaiming, "Where is he? where is he? where is my dear boy?" and at the same moment an old man entered the room, who had apparently, though not really, numbered more years than Monsieur de Liancourt himself. He was dressed in a bluff coat of buckskin, laced with gold, with a high-standing collar, according to a fashion passed away some fifteen or twenty years before, with no ruff round his neck, but merely a plain linen cape turned back from his grey beard and neck. Over his shoulders hung a riband, from which was suspended the cross of a commander of the order of St. John, and in his hand he carried a stout staff, on which he leant as he advanced up the hall, somewhat limping in his gait from an old wound in the leg. A deep scar appeared on his brow, and a large hole on his right cheek, mementoes of former fields; and his whole frame seemed greatly shattered by injuries and labours. His eye, however, was clear and bright, his cheek warm and healthy, and his countenance frank and smiling.

The instant he entered he paused, looked

straight towards De Montigni, and then stretched out his arms. The young man sprang to meet his embrace, and the old commander held him for several moments to his heart, unable apparently to speak from emotion. A tear rose in the eye of Rose d'Albret as she witnessed the meeting, and for a moment she turned away towards the window.

"Welcome, welcome, Louis," cried the old Commander de Liancourt, "welcome back at length, my boy; but what the devil made thee stay away so long? thou shouldst have been here years ago! 'Tis a bad business, Louis, 'tis a bad business; but no matter for that, it can't be helped. We are all fools at some time of our lives; one man when he is young, another man when he is old. Heaven help us, man, how tall thou art grown! and I'll warrant you, notwithstanding all they say of your studies, can wield a sword or couch a lance with any one. *Pardie*, I'll have thee run a tilt with Chazeul in the court-yard to-morrow!" and dropping his voice, he added with a laugh, "Break his head for him, Louis; he is a coxcomb and a knave, though he be my sister's son; but she's not much better, for that matter."

While he spoke, he held the young man by the hand, and eyed him all over with a look of fond affection, seeming to attend but little to what he said in reply, though De Montigni answered him in warm terms of regard, and declared he looked in better health than when last he saw him.

"Ay, boy, ay," said the old commander, "rest and idleness have done something for me; though if I could have mounted my horse, I would have been in the field long ago; but this accursed wound still keeps me out of the saddle, and I am no better than an old woman—food for worms—food for worms, Louis! This old carrion of mine is quite ready for the earth, when it be God's will. But you must see old Estoc; he bore your father's cornet at Jarnac; and the old villain does not know you are come, or he would have been here long ago. Halloo there! Estoc! Estoc!" and he made the hall ring with his shout.

"For heaven's sake, my good brother," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "do not shake the walls of the château down. Some one tell Estoc that Monsieur de Montigni is arrived."

"Monsieur de Montigni!" said the commander, imitating his brother's tone. "Warm that, Louis!—cordial! Monsieur de Montigni! *Ventre saint gris!* have you quite forgot he is your nephew, brother? Your eldest sister's son? Ah! poor Louise; if she could but see what I see! Well, 'tis no matter, the grave is a sure shield against many a wound."

"Come, come now, brother," said Monsieur de Liancourt, somewhat sharply, "your humour gets intolerable. Did you not promise that I should have none of this?"

"Promise? No, not a bit of it," cried the old commander; "I always keep my promises, Anthony; I wish others did as well. However, there is no use of talking now. You must have it all your own way. You always did; and a pretty affair you often made of it. Ah! here comes Estoc. Here he is, old comrade, here he is, with just the same face he went away, only with a beard on it!"

These words were addressed to a tall, old, weather-beaten man, as thin and as stiff as a lance, who advanced with great strides up the hall, and taking the Baron de Montigni in his arms, gave him a great hug; then suddenly letting him go, he said, "I could not help it, sir, indeed. Bless my heart, it seems as if you were little Louis still; do you recollect how I used to teach you to ride, and to shoot, and to play with sword and buckler?"

"Ay, that I do, Estoc," replied the young nobleman; "those lessons have served me well, many a time since, and no longer ago than to-day. But I must give my companion of this afternoon's adventure into your charge, Estoc. Where is Monsieur de Chasseron?" he continued, looking around.

"He left the room this moment, probably to see after his horse," observed father Walter, advancing from the window for the first time.

"I will go and find him," answered Estoc; "I passed some one in the vestibule, but as it is growing grey I scarcely saw him;" and he turned abruptly to depart.

"Hark ye, Estoc," said the old commander, detaining him for a moment, and speaking in a whisper, "come up to Louis' room when he goes to change his clothes. I must have some talk with him; the boy must know how he stands here—do you understand?"

Estoc nodded his head, and took his departure without reply.

In the meantime the priest had held out his hand to the young Baron de Montigni, saying, "Though the last to wish you joy on your return, sir, I do so sincerely, and trust you have fared well during your absence."

"Ah! good father," exclaimed the young Baron, "in this dim light I did not know you; but I am right glad to see you again, and have to thank you for many a wise counsel and much good instruction, by which I hope I have not failed to profit. Have you been well since last we parted?"

"As well as I could wish to be," replied the priest; "not that I am sure that high health is as great a blessing as men think. Like wealth and many another of this world's gifts, it sometimes leads us to forget our dependence on the Giver."

"I trust not to a well-regulated mind," said De Montigni; "and I am sure, to you it could be no source of evil."

The old man looked down and shut his teeth fast together; and Monsieur de Liancourt, wishing to bring a scene which was not altogether pleasing to him to a close as speedily as possible, told De Montigni that the evening meal would be ready in half an hour, so that he had but time to change his riding-dress.

The young nobleman lingered for a few moments, however, conversing with those around, and marking many things which the actors therein little knew that he observed. Chazeul had kept close to the side of Rose d'Albret since his conversation with the count had come to an end, and thrice he had endeavoured to engage her attention to himself, but in vain. At this moment, however, he said, with some degree of irritation in his tone, "You seem very much occupied, sweet Rose."

"So I am, Monsieur de Chazeul," she answered aloud, "and interested too. Are you not so?"

"Oh, certainly," he replied; "these receptions are always interesting ceremonies."

"Not to those with whom they are ceremonies," said Rose d'Albret; and while Chazeul bit his lip, and his brow contracted moodily, she turned to speak with father Walter de la Tremblade.

De Montigni was conversing, in the meantime, with his two uncles; but he had heard all, and marked particularly the words, "Monsieur de Chazeul;" and whatever other effect might be produced upon him, the immediate result was to throw him into a fit of thought, and make him answer some of Monsieur de Liancourt's questions at random.

"What are you thinking about, Louis?" cried the old commander; "my brother asks when you left Padua; and you say, five years."

"He is tired and exhausted," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "he had better go and take off these heavy boots, cool his head and hands in some fresh water, and come down to supper, where we will refresh him with a good cup of wine."

"I am tired," said the young nobleman, "for I have ridden more than twenty leagues to-day, so that I will take your advice, my good uncle, and find my way down to the supper-hall when I hear the trumpet."

Thus saying, he retired, passing through the vestibule, where in one of the deep windows he saw his old friend Estoc, still busily talking to the good farmer Chasseron. De Montigni did not stop, however, but merely said, as he passed by, "Take care of him, Estoc, and seek him out a comfortable room."

"That I will, sir," replied Estoc, and continued his conversation.

The first meeting between the two who now stood together, in the window, had been somewhat curious. On quitting the hall, the old soldier had entered the vestibule with his usual wide and hasty strides; and, as that side of the château was turned from the sun, so that it was darker than most other parts of the house, he might not have seen the man he came in search of, who was seated on a bench near the window, had not his attention been called by a voice pronouncing the word, "Estoc."

Turning quickly round he advanced towards him, and gazed in his face, saying, "You seem to know me, sir, and methinks I have seen you before."

"You have, my good friend," replied Chasseron; "we have met twice; do you not remember Michael Chasseron?"

"I remember Peter Chasseron, right well," replied the old soldier; "he took me prisoner at St. Jean, and treated me right kindly; but you are not the same," and while he spoke he continued to examine the countenance of his companion with great attention.

"And when he had taken you," replied the farmer, "he brought you to the person who was in command of the troop. That was his brother. I am the same. Do you recollect me now?"

Estoc gazed at him again, and then answered in a significant tone, "I think I do; but it is twelve years ago, and you were a young man then. Come into the window and let me look at you."

"I am the same I tell you," replied Chasseron, moving into the window; "there, take as good a look as you like."

Estoc did not fail to do so; then cast down his eyes, and bit the side of his hand with his teeth. "Well," he said, at length, "you are a bold man to venture here, all things considered. Do you not know that we are all Catholics in this place, and Monsieur de Chazeul one of the foremost of the League, who would think no more of putting you to death, be the result what it would, than of sitting down to his supper?"

"Parbleu! I know it right well," replied Chasseron; "and that is the reason I waited for you here. I am sure that you are not one who would betray me, and as for your leader, the good commander, I would put my

life in his hands without the slightest fear."

"That you might, that you might," said the old soldier; "and it will be better to tell him too. But do none of these people know you? Some of them must have seen you. Why, the very name of Chasseron, if they had recollected, was enough to make the marquis cut your throat. He would no more hesitate to roast a Huguenot alive in that court-yard, than to kill a stag or a wolf;" and, as he spoke, he looked over his shoulder to see that no one was coming.

"He would need two or three to help him," replied Chasseron; "and I felt sure that, if I trusted to the young baron's word, I should find those within who would take the part of honour. But none of these men have seen me for years; and when they did, 'twas but for a moment. You know in those days I came and went like the lightning. As for the name of Chasseron, it has long been forgotten too. But hark ye, Estoc, you love this young lord it seems? Now it is for his sake that I have come hither; not for a night's lodging, which I could obtain where I chose. I have heard at Cœuvres that they are playing him false here; and that there are plans afoot for doing him wrong in several ways. Perhaps I may aid him, if I know the facts; and I would fain do so for his good father's memory. He was as high and honourable a gentleman as any in France. Though adversaries, we were not enemies, and I owed him something too for courtesies shown when, God help me, there were few to show them."

"Ah! I wish my poor lord could hear those words," cried Estoc. "But you are right, sir, you are right. They are playing poor Louis false. Wait a bit, and you shall hear more in the course of the evening; and if you can help him, though I doubt it, God will bless you, were you twenty times a heretic."

"Parbleu! you must be speedy with your tidings, Master Estoc," said Chasseron, "for I must be away before nine to-morrow. I have got my wheat to dispose of," he added; "a weighty matter in my new trade."

The old soldier laughed. "I should think, sir, you would make but a poor farmer," he replied; "but you shall have all my news this very night. Ha! here comes the young lord. As soon as he is gone by, I will tell the good old commander that you are in the house; and you shall see him yourself in his room."

Before Chasseron could reply, De Montigni passed through the vestibule, as I have before described; but the moment he was gone the old soldier added, "We are to talk with the poor lad while he is dressing, and if I can

so manage it, you shall be called to take a part; if not, I will find the means ere night be over. Here come the rest—let them pass, and then wait for me. I will be back with you in a minute.”

As he spoke, all those whom we have seen conversing in the hall passed through the vestibule, with the exception of Rose d'Albret, who retired by another door, leading direct to her own apartment. The good old commander, supporting himself on his stick, was the last that appeared, with his eyes bent down upon the ground, and his lips muttering disconnected sentences to himself. In the semi-darkness that now reigned, no one took any notice of Chasseron or his companion; but the moment that his old leader had reached the opposite door, Estoc followed, and taking his hand familiarly, put it through his own arm, as if to assist him on his way; but at the same time he bent his head and seemed to whisper. The old commander suddenly stopped, gazing in his face, and then hurried on at a quicker pace than before, in evident agitation.

In less than two minutes, Estoc returned, saying in a low voice, “Come, sir, come! he is wild to see you;” and, with a quick step, Chasseron followed him from the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHEMERS.

LOUIS DE MONTIGNI was in hope of a brief period of repose and solitude; repose not so much of the body as of the mind; solitude in which he might, to use the fine expression of Holy Writ, “Commune with his own heart and be still.” He had much need of it; for the last half hour had exhausted him more than all the fatigues of the day. It had been one of greater emotion than he knew, or would admit; and what is there more wearing than emotion? He imagined that he felt pained and grieved, only at finding, on his coming back to a place which had long been his home, that he was half a stranger, his place in its familiarity usurped by another, and he himself looked upon, not as the returned son of the house, but as one to be observed and marked by those now in possession. But in reality and truth, there were deeper sources of anxiety and sorrow below; though it must always be full of anguish to a young and inexperienced heart to find for the first time the emptiness of professions, the hollowness of half the friendships to which we trusted, the selfishness of the many, the baseness of some, the insta-

bility of others, the falsehood, even of the near and dear—to discover that a few short years, a few short hours, perhaps, will shake us loose from hearts in which we fancied ourselves rooted so that tempests would not tear us out. Yet there are more painful things than even these every-day lessons of the world's constitution; things that, blighting at once hope and confidence, extinguishing the lamp of the future, and clouding the moonlight of memory, dispose us to lay down the weary head upon any pillow for repose—even if it be that of the grave.

He would not show all that he felt; he wished to show no part of it; and he was anxious, most anxious, to have a short space, in which, by his own power over his own mind, he might repress all external appearances of disappointment and regret, and so school his heart, that not the slightest token of what was passing therein might show itself in his outward demeanour.

With this purpose, and in this hope, he took his way up one of the narrow, wooden staircases in the château, towards the apartments which had been formerly apportioned to him, and which he had been informed were again prepared for his reception. He entered the well-remembered anteroom and looked round. Everything was just as he left it; the very chairs and tables were the same, and seemed in the same position. He wished that it had been otherwise; he would have been glad to see gilding and tinsel, and new decorations, rather than the well-remembered old oak panelling, the huge chimney, with the iron dogs to support the wood, and the tall-backed, uncomfortable chairs. It made him feel that man alone was changed. It was full of memories which he wished not to indulge. He went on quickly into the room beyond, taking up the lamp which stood upon the table in the ante-chamber; but there it was just the same. His servants, thinking he would stay longer in the hall, had spread out some of his apparel in haste and had gone to greet their fellows in the offices; but even the sight of the various things he had brought with him from a foreign land were painful to him. They brought the thought of peaceful days, brightened by occasional dreams of happiness to come, of expectations which in truth he had been in no haste to realise till it was too late, of vague aspirations, which, like some shrubs that produce a long succession of ephemeral blossoms, had died as they bloomed, but flowered again every day.

Casting himself into a seat, he leaned his head upon his hand, and for a minute or two gave himself up to thought. “’Tis strange,” he said to himself; “I knew not how deeply I should feel this, till I came near these

gates. The apprehension was less than the reality. Scarcely an hour ago, I could have talked calmly of all; could have jested on it, as any indifferent thing. But to feel it, is very, very different." He mused for a moment, then raised his eyes and gazed about the room. Someone had placed an ebony crucifix upon a small table at the side, with the figure of the dying Saviour in ivory standing boldly out from the black background of the cross. It was the only change that had taken place, and yet it struck him with melancholy, rather than consolatory feelings.

"I must conquer this," he thought. "What right have I to repine at another's happiness?" But ere he could give further way to his reflections, he heard a step in the anteroom; and rising, he cast off his cloak, and unlooped his collar, as if engaged in preparing for the evening meal.

The moment after, his uncle, the Count de Liancourt, entered with an air of assumed cheerfulness, which Montigni saw at a glance only covered some anxiety.

"Well, Louis," he said, "all, you see, is just as you left it."

"All in these rooms appear to be so, sir," he replied; and then feeling that there was more point in the words than he wished to give them, he added, "But a good many changes seem to have been made in the rest of the house."

"Few, very few," answered Monsieur de Liancourt; "and most of those I had long intended. The others are but preparations for the wedding."

His nephew was silent, and the count paused for want of that assistance which a single word might have given. At that moment one of the young nobleman's servants appeared, and began to arrange his apparel; but the count resolved to pursue the purpose for which he had come, gave an impatient "Pshaw!" and then added, "Send him away, Louis; he can come again in a quarter of an hour."

The man withdrew at a sign; and De Montigni, turning to his uncle with a grave and self-possessed tone, which somewhat surprised and embarrassed one who had been always accustomed to think of him as a boy, inquired, "Have you anything of importance to say, sir?" adding, "if you have, I could wish you would reserve it till to-morrow; when less fatigued I shall be able to hear it with better attention and with a clearer mind."

"Oh, no! nothing—nothing particular, Louis," said his uncle, who had seated himself; "only we were speaking of Chazeul's marriage. I trust you think it is a good arrangement?"

"To anything that may promote Made-

moiselle d'Albret's happiness, I cannot of course object," replied De Montigni gravely, and there he stopped.

Another embarrassing pause succeeded, and then the count went on, saying, "It is a matter I have long determined on. The union of the houses of Chazeul and De Marennes must at once strike every one as an alliance much to be desired. The important family thus raised up must, in the present troubled state of the country, gain great influence, and may be of great service to the State; and as to private and family considerations, they all tend strongly to the same point; and therefore, after mature consideration, I resolved that it should take place."

De Montigni made no answer; and before his uncle, who was not at all well pleased with his silence, could find words to go on, a heavy step was heard in the anteroom, and the good old commander opened the door. The old man's eyes were somewhat red, as if they had had recent tears in them; but when he saw his brother, a look of surprise and disappointment came into his countenance, and he drew back a step, saying, "I did not know you were here, Anthony. I will not disturb you."

"Oh, no, my dear uncle!" cried De Montigni; "Monsieur de Liancourt says he has nothing important to say. Pray come in. You must not take the trouble of coming up that long stair for nothing."

"No, no, Louis," replied the commander, "some other time—to-morrow, or the next day we will have our chat. Anthony's nothings are often the most important things he has to do;" and thus saying, he retired and closed the door.

"How peevish he grows!" said the count. "However, Louis, I am glad to find you approve of your cousin's marriage with my fair ward; and—"

"Nay, sir," interrupted De Montigni, "I neither approve nor disapprove of a matter in which I have no say, and have never been consulted. Whatever Mademoiselle d'Albret thinks best for her happiness must have my best wishes for its result."

"Well, well, that is the same thing," cried his uncle, somewhat sharply; "of course she thinks it will be for her happiness; and I am sure of it, which is of more importance. Rose is a very good, amiable girl, and will always be able to find happiness in the line of duty; and I am not one to deceive myself as to what is best for those committed to my care. It has been my anxious contemplation for many a year, how to promote the interests and comfort of the three persons who seem especially placed under my guidance and direction, Rose, yourself, and Chazeul. He being of an eager, active, and worldly

disposition, is best fitted for struggling with these hard and contentious times, and therefore in the distribution of the property of my family, which is large enough to satisfy all, I intend to assign him all the territorial possessions at my death. On you who are of a studious, calm, and thoughtful character, I intend to bestow at once all the rich benefices which are held by the house of Liancourt. They are equal in revenues to the land, and, with your own hereditary property, will form a princely income. Then the bishopric of Sens must necessarily soon fall in, for my uncle who holds it is in his eightieth year. To it will be easily attached the hat of a cardinal, as has indeed been generally done; and thus one of the highest dignities in the world will be secured to you."

He spoke volubly and eagerly, to get over as fast as possible the announcement of the dispositions he thought fit to make, without interruption; and he then added with an air of dignified satisfaction, "Thus you see, my dear Louis, I have in every respect considered your happiness and your fortune, and nothing remains but to sign the papers which confirm this arrangement."

But though the count thought himself both just and generous, and felt himself taking an elevated position towards his nephew, Louis de Montigni saw the matter in a somewhat different light. "Rose d'Albret," he thought, "the whole inheritance of Marennes, all the estates of Liancourt added to those of Chazeul! This is certainly the lion's portion, yet would I give up every part therein right willingly but one."

He remained silent, however, with his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the table, till his uncle exclaimed impatiently, "You make no answer, Louis. Is it possible that you are dissatisfied—ungrateful?"

"No, my dear uncle!" replied the young nobleman. "But this is a very important question; and I told you that I would fain have some repose before I discussed such things! I repeat it, that I could much wish to have some time for consideration and thought, before I make any answer, further than that I thank you deeply for all the care and kindness which you have always bestowed upon me."

"Methinks," said his uncle in a tone of displeasure, "that one moment's reflection were enough to show you the propriety of that which is proposed, and to induce you to sign at once the papers necessary to confirm such a well-considered arrangement."

"Nay, sir," answered De Montigni, "it might be so, if only the disposition of your property were concerned."

"And pray what is there more?" asked

the count angrily; "what have I pretended to dispose of, in which I have no right to dictate? I suppose you will not deny, that I am authorised to bestow the hand of my ward where I think proper? What is there else that I dispose of, that is not my own?"

"Of me, my dear uncle," replied De Montigni. "If I understand you right, I must enter the Church. Though some men hold bishoprics without such a process, according to the evil practices of these corrupt days, such cannot be the case long: nor were I one to follow such an iniquitous course. All these benefices by right ought to be held by an ecclesiastic; and I will never hold them but as one. Indeed, what you have said of my studious and thoughtful habits shows that you know such must be the case. The Church, therefore, is to be my destiny under this plan; but surely such a step requires somewhat more than a *moment's consideration*. It is a question I have never contemplated: it never entered my thoughts. I came hither prepared to throw off my somewhat long-indulged inactivity, to take a part in what is passing in my native land, after due deliberation and inquiry to draw the sword rather than to put on the gown. Nay, more, I should have done so long ago, had you yourself not urged me strongly, in every letter but your last, to remain at Padua and continue my studies, without entering into a strife where family is ranged against family, and brother takes arms against brother."

"And why did I do so?" asked Monsieur Liancourt. "Simply because I have long determined on what I have this night announced. Is it the rich bishopric, so long in my family, to be lost—to be thrown away for a whim? No, no, Louis. It was that you might be qualified to hold it, and disposed by habit to receive it, that made me wish you to stay where you were."

"If you had announced your wishes, sir, before, I should have been better prepared to fulfil them," replied his nephew; "as it is I must have time. There may be men who look upon these things lightly, who could take upon them the solemn vows which bind them to the highest and holiest duties, without care or consideration. They may be right, or they may be wrong; they may be men who, from the course of their life and the habits of their thought, are fully prepared for such a decision, though conscious of its great importance: or they may be those who, never intending to fulfil the obligations of any station in which they are placed, look upon all indifferently. I am in neither of these conditions; I have never considered the subject; I have prepared my mind for other things; but if I do consent,

it will be with the determination to act up to the calling I assume, and be an ecclesiastic in spirit and in heart, as well as in name."

"Oh, if it be only conscientious considerations that withhold you," said his uncle, "those will be soon satisfied by good father Walter. He shall speak with you this very night. You know him, and also esteem him."

"Much," replied Montigni, "and will gladly converse with him for an hour or two alone on this subject."

"Why not at once?" asked his uncle; "I can call him in a minute, his chamber is but at the end of the passage."

As he spoke, however, the sound of a trumpet, as was then common in France, announced the hour of supper; and feeling that he could not press the subject further, Monsieur de Liancourt added, "Well, well, afterwards will do; and I doubt not that tomorrow I shall find you quite determined, and willing to sign the papers, and accept the benefices, which shall be made over to you immediately."

"What are these papers, sir?" asked De Montigni, without giving any reply upon the subject of his willingness.

"Oh, nothing but common forms," replied his uncle; "I cannot explain them all to you just now, for supper is served. Come, De Montigni."

"I am not quite ready yet," answered the young baron; "pray don't wait for me; I will join you in a few minutes."

His uncle accordingly left him; but instead of proceeding to change his dress, De Montigni covered his eyes with his hands, and gave himself up for a few minutes to bitter and anxious thought. Oh, how many wild and tumultuous feelings passed through his bosom during that short space of time! and all were sad and painful. The contemplation of the future, the memory of the past, the consideration of the present, regret, apprehension, indecision, were all present to his mind at once; and, for some time, thought seemed one strange chaos of indistinct and gloomy forms, from which at length rose up one image more painful than all the rest. His mind rested upon Rose d'Albret, and upon the idea of losing her for ever. Remembrance brought her back as the companion of his boyhood; he recollected how she had shared his sports, how she had ridden by his side through the scenes around, how she had taken part in his pleasures and his fancies, how she had soothed him under any of the petty griefs of youth, how she had turned from him anger and reproof, when in the gay light-heartedness of early years he had offended the irritable gravity of age. She had al-

ways loved him, he thought, and he had always loved her, with the tender and unselfish love of years when passion is unknown. He had ever thought her beautiful—most beautiful; but it was the kindness, the affection, in her radiant eyes that gave them double light to him; and now he had seen her in the full loveliness of womanly perfection, he had beheld the same looks bent upon him from a face which might well inspire more ardent feelings; and yet he was even now to see her given to another—now, at the very moment when he had most learnt to long for her himself. Often he had fancied in his boyish dreams that, at some future period she would be his own; that their mutual lives, through maturity and age, would pass in the same happy confidence, in the same warm affection, which had brightened their childhood. He almost believed that some one had told him so, that she had been originally destined for him; and, as his mind rested upon that thought, his disappointment became the more bitter.

What was to be his future life then? to be cut off from all the joys of domestic life; to embrace that cold and stern profession which, in his Church, excluded those who adopted it from all the warm relations of husband and father; to pass his days in the dull routine of formal services, or in the petty intrigues and artful manœuvres which have too often disgraced the Roman hierarchy; to cast from him at once all the dreams and aspirations of young and energetic manhood; and, before his hair was grey, to clothe his mind with the chilly garment of age. He shrunk from the thought; but, when he recollected that Rose d'Albret was to be the wife of another, it seemed to him a matter of small moment how his after days were to be passed.

Such were some of his thoughts, and only some; for there were many, many more; and yet they occupied but a very few minutes. It was not one by one they came, but appeared before him like a hostile army stretching out at once on every side wherever his eye was turned. Nevertheless he could have gone on for hours, and yet not have exhausted all the bitter subjects of contemplation presented to him.

Most likely, indeed, he would have gone on much longer, had not one of his servants presented himself to assist him in dressing; and starting up from his sorrowful reveries, he hastened to cast off his travel-stained garments, and in a few minutes descended to the hall, where the rest of the party were assembled to supper.

A place was reserved for him between the count and the old commander. On the right hand of the latter sat father Walter, and on the opposite side were Chazeul and

Mademoiselle d'Albret. Two or three of the retainers of the house, who bore the rank of gentlemen, filled up the rest of the table, with Chasseron and Estoc at the bottom. It was on the countenance of Rose d'Albret, however, that the eyes of De Montigni rested, as with a slow step he entered the hall. She was looking thoughtfully down, with a pale cheek and a grave brow; and she did not look up till he had taken his seat, when she did so with a start, as if suddenly awakened from her reverie.

Monsieur de Liancourt made an effort to receive him with a cheerful and unembarrassed air, laughed and talked more than was necessary, but yet was evidently occupied with other thoughts, and not altogether well pleased. Chazeul tried hard to engage his fair companion in a low-toned conversation, but, failing there, turned to his cousin De Montigni, and by the sort of bantering persiflage which has been common in all ages to small wits, sought to show his own superiority as a man of the world, at the expense of his relation's inexperience. But the extent of De Montigni's information, his knowledge of other scenes and other lands, the higher tone of his mind, and, above all, that calmness which is often generated by deep and powerful feelings, even when they are those of sadness and disappointment, set the haughty and supercilious jests of the Leaguer at nought; and he often rebuked him with a quick and cutting reply, which made the old commander laugh, and once called a smile even upon the grave lips of father Walter.

Rose seemed greatly busied with her own thoughts, and attended little to what was passing, though once indeed she raised her eyes to Montigni's face with a slight smile, while he administered some wholesome chastisement to the jeering spirit of his cousin; and when he went on in a few brief sentences to point out that there were higher things in life than those on which Chazeul seemed to set such store, her eyes brightened, her look became full of interest and pleasure; and then she suddenly withdrew her gaze from his face, and fell into deeper thought than before.

There were one or two persons present who marked all this, and knew that the two cousins were rivals in heart, though not openly; and they easily judged, that the contrast was unfavourable to him who seemed the successful lover. Amongst these, there were some who wished to prolong it; but the priest took the first opportunity of stopping any further comparison, by giving thanks after meat, as soon as possible, and rising to depart.

In the little confusion which always takes place at the conclusion of a meal, the old

commander drew De Montigni aside and whispered, "I will come up and see you directly, Louis, if you will go up to your own room."

"The count is going to send Monsieur de la Tremblade to me," replied the young nobleman, in the same tone; "will he interrupt you?"

"Yes, yes, diabolically," replied the old soldier: "get rid of him as soon as you can, Louis. I will set a watch, to see when he leaves you, and come immediately after, for I must and will speak with you to-night, let who will try to prevent it. Mind, be upon your guard with him," he added, "promise nothing, engage yourself to nothing. Have I your word, that you will not, till you have spoken with me?"

"You have, my dear uncle," replied Montigni; and at the same moment the priest approached, and laying his hand upon the young baron's arm, he said, "Monsieur de Liancourt tells me, you desire to speak with me."

"He wished me to have some conversation with you, my good father," replied De Montigni; "and I shall be most happy when you are at leisure."

"This moment, if you please," rejoined the priest; and they left the hall together, the young nobleman perceiving as he did so, that the eyes of Rose d'Albret were fixed upon him, with an eager and somewhat anxious gaze.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIEST.

NOTHING was said, either by De Montigni or father Walter, till they reached the chamber of the former, where, closing the door, the young nobleman placed a seat for his reverend companion, and asked him if Monsieur de Liancourt had held any communication with him upon the subject on which they were about to speak.

"A few words were all that passed," replied father Walter, in a mild, though grave tone; "but they were sufficient to show me that the matter on which you wish to consult me is one in regard to which your uncle and myself have often conferred before."

"Nay," replied De Montigni; "the count has not put the business on its right footing; let us settle that first, my good father. I did not desire to consult you, but he declared that you would easily remove from my mind the strong objections which I entertain to pledging myself for any consideration to

enter the Church without much deliberation, and a considerable time for thought. I expressed myself most willing to hear all you could say upon the subject, though I much doubted, from a knowledge of my own character, that you would succeed in removing my scruples, and, from a knowledge of yours, that you would even make the attempt."

"You were perfectly right, my son," replied the priest, after a moment's pause; "my arguments could but tend to show that the profession which your uncle wishes you to embrace is the highest, as it is the holiest, to which man can dedicate himself; but I fear much, that very consideration would tend rather to induce you to pause long, and to think well before you took upon yourself such high duties and responsibilities, than to hurry you on, as is the case with so many, into a rash, I might almost call it an impious, intrusion into a sacred calling, which should be approached with reverence, and not without a full concurrence of the heart."

De Montigni smiled, well pleased. Various circumstances, all apparently small, but weighty in their sum, had induced him to imagine that father Walter de la Tremblade was one of those who had consulted together to frustrate his hopes, and disappoint his wishes, but the calm and reasonable answer which he now made removed the suspicion. Whether he deceived himself or not may be seen hereafter.

"I am happy to find, my dear father," he said, "that your good and disinterested opinion confirms my own, as it will give me strength and confidence in my determination."

"Of all the many wise maxims which have come down to us, confirmed by the experience of ages," replied the priest, "one of the surest is, 'Do nothing rashly;' and if applicable to the common affairs of life, it is still more so to points where the whole of our future existence, here and hereafter, is affected. You are right, my son, to pause and deliberate; but before I give any advice beyond the general opinion which I have expressed, let me hear all the circumstances, the doubts, and considerations that affect you; and you shall then have my best counsel, which may, perhaps, be valuable, as that of a man long accustomed to consider, and with God's aid, to decide upon questions, in which the consciences of those very dear to him, as members of his flock, are concerned. Tell me what are your doubts—what are your difficulties; and if I can I will resolve them."

"My doubts, good father," replied Louis de Montigni, "are simply whether I am fitted, either by inclination or by character,

for the profession my uncle would put upon me. No mention was ever made of such a plan till this very night; and now, fatigued in body and somewhat agitated in mind, I am asked to decide at once upon a question of such vital importance to myself."

"That is wrong—that is all very wrong," answered the priest. "You must have time—it is absolutely necessary. Yet," he continued, after a moment's pause, "I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake. I am sure Monsieur de Liancourt did not intend to urge such a speedy decision upon that point. Perhaps it was your acquiescence alone in the disposal of his property that he required. You are well aware that the benefices may be held by one who is not in the Church; and his conferring them on you, while he is himself living, will prevent any cavil which might be raised in the distracted state of the country, with regard to your obtaining them, if they were merely destined for you at his death. I do not mean," he added in a grave tone, "to pronounce any opinion upon the propriety of laymen holding such property. That is not a question for me to decide."

"But it is one for me to consider in accepting them," said De Montigni; "and I scruple not to acknowledge, that I hold the corrupt practice in horror and reprobation."

"I must not deny that I think you are right," replied father Walter; "but yet your refusal to accept this portion of his property, would greatly embarrass and grieve your uncle. All the arrangements being concluded for Monsieur de Chazul's marriage with Mademoiselle d'Albret, your rejection of the share assigned to you would prove a serious inconvenience to all parties; and I am sure you would not wish to throw any impediment in the way of her happiness, or your cousin's either."

"And does her happiness so entirely depend upon this marriage?" asked the young nobleman bitterly.

"Undoubtedly!" replied the priest, with an air of surprise at the very question.

"Then my course will be easy!" exclaimed De Montigni. "I will never do ought to give her one uneasy moment."

"That is noble, and generous, and like yourself!" said Walter de la Tremblade, holding out his hand to him. "I was quite sure that you would never hesitate at any personal sacrifice for the happiness of those you love. What course, then, do you intend to pursue?"

De Montigni, however, remembered the promise he had made to his uncle, and he replied, "Of that I must think; all I can say at present is, that no wish of Rose d'Albret's shall ever be thwarted by me."

First, in order to form a judgment of my future conduct, I would fain know all the circumstances of the case; and, my good father, as you have thus far dealt frankly with me, I would fain ask you a few questions, hoping for clear information."

"I will give you the best that I possess, my son," replied the priest. "But you must recollect that I am not a man of the world, and meddle little with things that are not brought absolutely under my notice."

"Well, then, to begin with matters that you do understand," said De Montigni; "if I accept these benefices, and sign the papers my uncle wishes me to sign, do I in any degree bind myself either to enter the Church, or to hold preferment which I think should be reserved for ecclesiastics?"

"Not in the least, my son," answered father Walter, "nothing can bind you to the Church but vows made to the Church; and as to the benefices, you can give them all away the next day; at no greater risk than being called by some, an enthusiastic fool."

"That is soon met," said the young nobleman; "but if this be so, what is the need of my signing any papers at all?"

The priest paused for a moment in thought; but then answered, looking suddenly up, "It is simply because, as your uncle's nearest relation, you have a claim to his property, either the entire estate or a moiety, I know not well which. The benefices he can bestow where he likes, and he gives them to you as an equivalent to the other, thinking that, if the bishopric can be obtained for you, as doubtless it might be if you so liked, the advantages would be at least equal."

"My uncle did not tell me this!" replied De Montigni, with an air of mortification. "My uncle did not tell me this!"

"Perhaps he thought you knew it already," rejoined father Walter; "or, perhaps, he did not remember how generous and self-denying you have always shown yourself."

"He should have dealt openly with me," said the young man in a mournful tone, "he should have dealt openly with me."

He then thought for a few minutes, while the priest watched the varying expressions that came over his countenance with an inquiring and interested eye, reading them as they rose. Perhaps he did not altogether interpret them aright, though the true Roman Catholic priest, who, following the rule of his order, strictly excludes from his breast half the passions that affect other men, learns to trace their workings in others with a skill which those who suffer them cannot acquire. He stands as a spectator of the most critical part in the busy game of

life, and sees the cards in either hand, and judges where they are played well or ill.

At length the young nobleman said aloud, "So then I have some real power in this matter; and they would have concealed it from me. A somewhat dangerous course!"

"Perhaps such was not the view, my son," answered father Walter, "the matter could not be concealed from you long, as, if you read the papers, you must have seen what they contained."

"I am not sure of that, good father," rejoined De Montigni; "they might calculate upon my not reading them at all, or that their contents veiling their meaning in the profuse words of the law, would afford me no clue to my own rights. However, all this must be inquired into. I will now know the truth, wholly and entirely."

"I trust," said the priest gravely, "that you will in no degree forfeit that character of frank and generous disinterestedness which you gained in youth. It is a jewel, my son, inestimable from its rarity. Come, Louis, let me tell your uncle that you will sign the papers."

The young man gazed in his face intently; but father Walter returned the look with calm and unflinching firmness, and then added, "I am no party to any deceit, if any have been committed."

"I believe you, father," replied De Montigni, "for it is you who have unveiled the deceit; but as for the rest, I will make no rash promise. I will know the whole clearly, before I act or promise to act; I will know what are my own rights, and their full extent; I will know the motives of others, their conduct, and its causes."

The priest smiled, and shook his head; "You lay out labour for many a long day, my son," he said, "if you propose to penetrate into the secrets of any human heart; and in the meantime you stop a union desired by all to wait upon your caprice. Look into your own bosom, Louis, and inquire there whether the motives of such a conduct may not have a source in passions you will not like to own; disappointment of some chimerical dreams, jealousy of another's happiness, or revengeful feelings for imaginary injury."

"No, no, no!" replied De Montigni, "my conduct shall be influenced by none of these; and whatever my motives are, they shall be made clear in the eyes of all."

"Well, before you act," continued the priest, "ask yourself if what your uncle proposes is at all unfair. In the division of his property he assigns you more than the simple half, though perhaps not the moiety you might like the best. There is no great injustice in this; there is nothing to move anger or suspicion; and yet you are evidently

somewhat heated, and nourish doubts of those that love you, which you have no just reason to entertain."

"Father, you are mistaken," answered De Montigni, "I am aught but angry; my heart feels too cold and chilled for anything so warm. Suspicion may be there—would it had never entered—but who can help it? When once a concealment or deceit has been practised in matters where all should be fair and open as the day, can confidence be ever restored? no more than you can restore the white bloom to the grape or to the plum which you have once pressed in your hand. I will think of this, good father, I will think of it all well. No man can reproach me for examining closely into that in which I have so great an interest; no man shall have to reproach me for the manner in which I act when I have examined. But let me put a picture before your eyes ere you go, in order that you may see what necessarily presents itself to my eyes. It is of an uncle and two nephews; the one the son of an elder sister, the other of a younger; the first possessed of moderate estates, but a claim, it seems, to his uncle's property; the other possessed of larger estates already, but, if I judge rightly, without that claim. The one is sent by his uncle and guardian to a foreign country to study; the other remains upon the spot. At the end of five years they meet again, and the uncle proposes a plan which he declares to be equitable. To the son of his eldest sister, who has been absent so long, he offers certain benefices, and proposes that he shall enter the Church. To the son of the younger, who has remained upon the spot, he gives the whole of his estates, the hand of his fair ward, and the large property which she inherits. Do not suppose, father, I can shut my eyes to such things; do not suppose that I can do aught but feel them bitterly. Mark me, however, I say not that I will reject this arrangement, even if I have power to do so; I say not that I will throw the least impediment in the way of views and plans which were formed without my concurrence and without my knowledge; but I do say, that I will consider, and examine, and ponder, before I in any way sanction a proceeding, by which I am destined to be, in every sense, a loser."

"I thought," replied the priest mildly, "that you had already determined not to do anything which could impede the union of Mademoiselle d'Albret with the man of her choice; that you would not frustrate her wishes, or delay her happiness?"

"Nor will I," answered De Montigni; "but I must be well assured in the first place of the conduct which she herself wishes to pursue."

Father Walter shook his head gravely, saying, "My son, my son, I fear you are deceiving yourself. I am not aware whether your knowledge of women be much or little, whether in studious seclusion you have passed your time without mingling with the general world, or whether you have frequented the gay society of Italy, and gained an insight into the female heart as it there appears. But do not deceive yourself into a belief, because Mademoiselle d'Albret sometimes speaks coldly to your cousin, affects an occasional indifference, ay, or even adds a harsh word towards him—do not believe, I say, that she does not love him. I have always seen that women, circumstanced as she is, from the very modesty of their nature, assume such disguises to conceal the warmer feelings of their heart; and the men with whom they are most free, familiar, ay, and perhaps affectionate, have the least cause to suppose that they entertain any serious attachment to them, for where such exists, it always brings diffidence and some reserve along with it."

De Montigni mused. There was truth, he thought, in what the old man said—it might be, indeed, that he was right. True, in her youth Rose d'Albret was frank, open, and unreserved, her loves and her dislikes were plainly shown. But yet she might be changed. Womanhood and passion might have brought with them reserve, concealment, art. Who could say what in the space of five years might have been effected, and what the girl of fourteen might have become?

"Probably you are right, good father," he replied; "I know but little of woman or woman's arts; but still I am not deceiving myself. All I propose is to pause and consider all things, this as well as any of the rest, in fact, to use your own maxim, and 'do nothing rashly.' As I conclude you will see my uncle to-night, and report to him the result of our conference, pray tell him my resolution, such as it is, and explain to him in terms that will give him no offence, but yet convey my full meaning, that in my determination to consider before I act, I am too firm to be shaken. I find that I have somewhat too long suffered my conduct to be dictated by others, and I do so no more, whatsoever be the result."

"Can you not enable me, Monsieur de Montigni," asked the priest, "to fix some term for your consideration? As your uncle will have to shape his conduct as he may judge expedient to meet yours, it might be as well to name a time for your decision."

"That I cannot do," replied Montigni; "at least not to-night. At all events it shall not be long before I do decide. Small

time will suffice me, if no means be taken to impede me in judging for myself; if there be, those who employ them must be answerable for the delay. I will now be satisfied on all points—I will see the whole case clearly before I judge. Whenever I do so see it, my course will be determined in an hour. And now, good father," he continued, perceiving that the priest was about to reply, "I would fain discuss this subject with you no more, at least, to-night, though most happy to hear you upon any other, if you have aught else to say."

"Nothing, my son," replied father Walter, rising; "pray remember that the discussion has not been of my seeking. I never thrust myself upon the confidence of any one, happy to give advice or assistance where it is required, but never obtruding it, except at the sacred call of duty; and so, my son, good night and benedicite."

Thus saying, he slowly quitted the room, and walked deliberately down the stairs across a low-roofed hall, where several servants sat, and then mounting another staircase with a quicker step, found his way to the apartments of the Count de Liancourt. That gentleman, half undressed, was sitting in his dressing-gown conversing with Chazeul, and both eagerly turned to the priest as he entered, demanding, "Well, what does he say? how did you find him disposed?"

Walter de la Tremblade sat down in a vacant chair, and then looking from the one to the other, he said, "I found him firmer, sterner than could be expected from his character or his years. I fear, my son," addressing Monsieur de Liancourt, "that your policy has somewhat run awry. If instead of calling him back you had written to him the plain and straightforward state of the case, telling him that the marriage of Mademoiselle d'Albret with Monsieur de Chazeul here depended upon the renunciation of his claim to your estates, and begging him to send you his procuration instantly for the purpose of making that renunciation, he would have done so at once."

"Pshaw," cried Chazeul, "you must think him a greater fool than even I do, to suppose that if he were told those facts he would give up his chance of beauty, grace, and the united estates of Liancourt and Marennes."

"He is no fool," replied the priest, "but one of those with whom it is better to tell the whole truth, and engage his generosity and enthusiasm on your side, than suffer him to discover, not only the facts you would conceal, but that you have endeavoured to conceal them. Better to tell him the truth, Monsieur de Chazeul, than to let him find it out; and allow me to say, he has

found out one half already, and will find out the rest ere long."

"*Ventre bleu!* what has he discovered?" demanded Monsieur de Liancourt. "This is an affair indeed."

"He is right well informed," answered the priest, "that the estates of Liancourt are his at your death, in right of his mother."

Chazeul struck his hand vehemently upon the table, exclaiming, "Then the game is up."

"Not exactly," replied the priest; "had he known it a month ago, it would have been much better. Then at a distance, and without the means of further inquiry, he would, I am sure, have been easily induced to make the renunciation, in consideration of the benefices, without coming here at all."

"But he has been urging me for these two years," exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, "to give my consent to his return. I had no power to refuse him, and it was only by persuasions that I kept him there so long."

"Well, but the results, the results, Monsieur de la Tremblade," exclaimed Chazeul; "we will be guided by you. Tell us what conclusions you have come to, and what course it will be best to follow."

"From my conference with him this night," replied the priest, "I see exactly the state of his mind. In the first place I tell you he knows much, and suspects more; he perceives that you have attempted to keep him in the dark; and he is no weak studious boy, such as you believed. He is as firm as a rock, and determined upon his course. You cannot, and will not deceive him on any of the facts of the case; and at present his reply is, that he is determined to take full time to consider before he decides. There is one way, and only one way to act upon his mind. If you can induce Mademoiselle d'Albret to ask him to make the renunciation for her sake, he will do it without the slightest hesitation. Get her but to say three words to that effect, and he will sign the act to-morrow."

"Oh, then the whole matter is easy!" cried Chazeul. "I will induce her to do that in a moment."

The priest looked at him with a somewhat cynical smile, and replied, "You may not find so much facility as you expect, Monsieur. Ladies have caprices; and perhaps you may not be able to make her say the exact words you wish."

"Oh, but I am sure I can!" replied Chazeul. "I know the pretty Rose right well, with all her coquettish ways for goading on a lover's passion, by airs of coldness and indifference; but she is not such a fool as to

be blind to the advantages of the most brilliant fortune she can reach in France. With the united estates of Liancourt, Marennes, and Chazeul, we take our seat amongst the highest of the land. Did you not mark what she said to me to-day, about the splendours of a court? Such hopes and expectations, once entering a woman's head, never go out of it, good father."

The priest paused and mused with a slight smile curling his lips; but at length he replied, "Doubtless you are more learned in women's hearts than I am, Monsieur de Chazeul; you have had more to do with them, though in the confessional we sometimes hear strange secrets. However, if you will take my advice, you will not trust to your own unassisted efforts, but send for your mother at once. She is within a two hours' journey, and may easily be here before noon to-morrow."

"Right, right, father," cried Monsieur de Liancourt, "we will not lose a moment's time. Jacqueline's head is worth all ours put together. It always was so; and poor Louise, when she was alive, was no match for her at all. Let us not lose a moment, but send a messenger to her to-night, so that she may set out the first thing to-morrow. See to it, Chazeul, see to it; for I am tired, and going to bed. Choose some stout fellow who will do the errand well. Let him avoid the wood, and take the Chartres road; 'tis but half a league about."

"I will do it at once," said Chazeul, "for it is now near ten. But still I am sure that I can persuade fair Rose to make the request, before my mother comes; and so, good-night, sir."

Thus saying, he left the room, and father Walter only remained to shake his head with a doubtful air, and say, "He is too confident. God send that he mars not all;" and he, too, left Monsieur de Liancourt to seek repose.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDECEIVED.

IN the Château of Marzay, on that night, as every day in the wide world in which we live, care and anxiety, hope and expectation, the selfish intrigue, the means of frustrating it, the dark design, the events that are to bring it to light, were all going on side by side at once, separated from each other by thin partitions which served to conceal the proceedings of the various actors from each other, but not from the eye of that over-

ruling Providence who apportions success and disappointment, joy and sorrow, reward and punishment, according to His wise but inscrutable will.

Less than a hundred yards from the chamber of Monsieur de Liancourt, Louis de Montigni sat after the priest left him, with his arms folded on his chest, his head bent down, and his eyes fixed upon the ground. He thought bitterly over much that had passed. The words which Walter de la Tremblade had spoken concerning the heart of woman still rung in his ears; the probable causes of the peculiarities he had remarked in the conduct of Rose d'Albret, still agitated his mind; and he asked himself, "Can she really love him? She who was clear-sighted, as well as frank, thoughtful as well as gay, generous, kind, liberal, can she love this man, who from youth till now has shown himself the same selfish, bold, confident, cunning, and presuming being? She used to see through him, and understand him when he came here as a youth, but a few years older than myself. It may be so, and perhaps the priest is right. If so, it were as well to renounce all without further hesitation, not to let her or any one perceive the hopes that are to be disappointed, the vain expectations that are to vanish at a breath, nor to call down that pity which is always more or less mingled with contempt, nor excite the scornful merriment of the winner in this perilous game. No, that I will not do; and yet this is a hard and a bitter act to require of me, which may well justify some doubt and some delay. Hark! there is my uncle's foot; I shall now hear more. The good old man has all his eyes open where my interests and happiness are concerned. From him I shall hear the pure truth, undisguised and plain. I almost doubt that priest: yet he spoke fairly and candidly too; but these men of the gown, dependent on great families, however virtuous and right may be their inclinations, gain a bias towards the views of their patrons, which often blinds their eyes to the plain course of justice."

Such were the thoughts of the young Baron de Montigni, till at length the old soldier Estoc threw open the door, and the commander limped into the room.

"Now lock the door, Estoc!" cried the good knight, seating himself in the chair which his nephew placed carefully for him; "lock the door, we will have no more interruptions. I have a right to have my say too, Louis. *Ventre saint gris*, to use the language of the Philistines, we will have it out now, Louis."

"Most assuredly, sir," replied the young nobleman; "I will suffer no one to interrupt us. My uncle, the count, as once my guardian and my eldest relative, might of

course command my first attention ; but now that is over, you, my dear uncle, have the next claim upon me, and I will not allow any one to deprive me of the pleasure or the benefit of hearing your conversation and advice."

"Well said, boy ! Well said !" cried the old commander. "Do you hear that, Estoc ? He's no chicken now, eh ? By my faith, Anthony will find himself mistaken. I like that well. You are right, Louis, to say, *you will not suffer* any one to interrupt us. That's the true tone. I have grown into a sort of some dependence here, thanks to my infirmities. I let them have all their own way ; but, *parbleu !* it will not do, for they turn tyrants when they are over indulged."

"I have come here, my dear uncle," replied his nephew, "with all reverence and respect for Monsieur de Liancourt. But my days of pupillage are over. While I stay in his house my chamber is my own, where I receive whom I like, when I like, and suffer not myself to be interfered with (so long as I observe the courtesies of life), when I am otherwise engaged. Whenever an attempt is made to restrain that communication with others that I may choose to hold, I leave the place, and take my lodging elsewhere."

"Right, right," cried the officer, "and if you go I will go with you, Louis. But sit down, Estoc. We have much to talk about, my boy. I trust you kept your word with me—I trust you promised nothing to the priest. He is a good man in the main ; but shrewd, Louis, shrewd as a winter's night—pile up the fire, Estoc. You promised nothing, eh, Louis ?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the young baron. "I merely assured him, that no consideration on earth would induce me to do ought that would thwart the inclinations, or impede the happiness, of Mademoiselle d'Albret ; but that, for the decision of my conduct, I must have time to consider, and that well."

"Ah, no ! I am sure you would not ! Poor dear little Rose, God bless her," cried the commander, "she deserves all tenderness. But if you did what they want, you would mar her happiness too, boy. Now let me hear what they sought of you. Then I will tell my tale."

De Montigni recapitulated, as well as he could, all that had passed between himself, his uncle, and the priest. He knew he could trust to those with whom he spoke ; and he strove to give the words that had been uttered as nearly as possible without change. He might indeed add a running commentary of his own conclusions, but he falsified nothing, he exaggerated nothing. As he

proceeded, his good uncle leaned his chin upon his stick, and listened to what was said without replying a word, though once or twice he struck the point of the staff sharply on the floor.

Old Estoc, however, was not so patient or so taciturn ; for more than once he uttered a quick oath, and murmured from time to time, "Pardie !—Morbleu !—Coquin !" in tones which showed that he was not at all edified with the reported discourse of Monsieur de la Tremblade.

But when the young nobleman had done all, the good commander's smothered fire broke forth in a blaze. "Curses upon them for ever !" he exclaimed ; "now they wonder there are Huguenots, and yet to see a Catholic priest playing knave and hypocrite in this way is enough to make any honest man turn Turk ! I am ashamed of my brother, Louis, I am ashamed of my family, but I am still more ashamed of my religion. It's not honest, my boy ! It's not honest, if it suffers its clergy to go playing such a double game, telling what suits them, and keeping back what does not suit them to speak. Now you shall hear the plain truth. You are heir of Liancourt, pure and undoubted. It was settled so long since, and so nothing but your own act can deprive you of the lands."

"I suspected that such was the case," replied the young nobleman, "as soon as I saw such anxiety to induce me to sign papers in haste, and without explanation."

"Suspected !" cried the old commander. "Why you should have known it long ago, if there had been honest men amongst us. I made my renunciation in poor Louise's favour—my sister—your mother, boy—when she married your good father—God rest his soul—and I took the Order of St. John. You are the heir, then, beyond all doubt ; but Jacqueline, your aunt, my sister—she's a devil if ever one was—has never ceased working at my poor weak brother Anthony to deprive you of your right."

"She never loved me, I know," replied De Montigni. "I remember when I was a mere boy—"

"Loved you ! that's not the point," exclaimed the commander. "She loves you just as well as anything else that stands in her way. It is that she loves herself, and loves herself in her son—the coxcomb ! She has set her mind upon seeing him wealthy and powerful. She always looked upon money as the best of blessings. That is why she married old Chazeul, a man she hated and despised, only that she might be richer than her elder sister ; and now this fellow has squandered half his father's estate, she thinks to patch up a greater fortune still by getting for him Marennnes and Liancourt."

The last she never can get if you are not a fool, Louis, and the first she cannot get without she gets the last."

"This seems to me a riddle, sir," said De Montigni, thoughtfully. "I understand that this marriage is fully settled, with the consent and approbation of all parties; and surely the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret, with her hereditary property, must be an object well worth striving for, even in the eyes of one who values wealth so much as my aunt De Chazeul."

"Ay, boy, ay!" cried the old commander, "so it would be, if she could get it. But the contract between the good Count de Marennés and your uncle is, that Rose is to marry his nephew, the subsisting heir of Liancourt. No name is mentioned, lest the heir should die in the meantime; but you were then, you are still, the subsisting heir of Liancourt, in virtue of your mother's rights as eldest daughter of my father, and my renunciation in her favour. If you put your hand to that paper you are worse than Esau, for you not only sell your birthright, but your bride as well for a mess of pottage."

De Montigni started up and paced the room for a moment with his hand clasped upon his forehead, and twice he muttered, "This is shameful!" He was tempted, strongly tempted, let what would be the result, to assert his rights at once; to claim his own without one consideration of the feelings of others; to exact the utmost sum of his inheritance, like a miser; to demand his bride willing or unwilling, under the engagement of her father.

But better thoughts first came to withhold him, and, as he reflected, difficulties appeared to impede him in such a course. The contract, doubtless, was in the hands of Monsieur de Liancourt. How could he prove it?—how establish his claim? The estates, indeed, he might withhold; his opposition might delay the marriage. But then he asked himself, could he inflict sorrow and disappointment on Rose d'Albret; could he dash from her lip the cup of hope and expectation? Most likely she looked forward to her approaching marriage as a thing decided beyond all chance of change. He had no substantial reason to suppose that she felt repugnance to it. Her mind was probably made up; her part taken; perhaps all the affections of her young heart engaged. Was he to be the person to blight all her prospects—to disappoint all her hopes? "No," he thought, "no!" and resuming his seat by his uncle, he said, "This deceit used towards me, my dear sir, is very bad. It disgusts one with the world and human nature. Yet one consideration will probably make me yield to all their wishes, and for-

bear from exercising my rights, even now that I know them."

"Phoo! Too!" cried the commander, interrupting him. "The boy is mad! Go, call our friend, Estoc. He must talk with him. There is a gentleman here, Louis—by the bye, he came with yourself—whom I met with once or twice in the old wars. He is as wise and good a man as ever lived—bating a bit of heresy in his notions, though scarce half a Huguenot either—a good soldier as any in France, and moreover a very prudent and clever person—a very wise, good man. Indeed, none better. I have been talking with him a long time since supper all about this affair, and you must take his advice, or at least listen to it. Depend upon it, you will find it good."

At first sight De Montigni shrunk from the idea of exposing all his feelings, nay, detailing all the particulars of his situation, to a comparative stranger, like Chasseron, one, too, whom he looked upon as an inferior. But before he could reply, Estoc had left the room; and, as he thought further, he remembered so much of bold decision in the man's character, so many traits of shrewd good sense in his conversation, that he began to think the opinion of such a person—totally independent of all passion and prejudice, knowing little of any of the parties, and who had seen so much of what had taken place upon his arrival—might be very useful as a corrective of any erroneous views which he himself might have adopted. He was free, too, to accept his advice or to reject it; and he knew the good old commander too well not to be sure that Chasseron must have borne a high character in former days, to have obtained his confidence and approbation, especially as a heretic—a sort of animal of which he was by no means fond. He waited then patiently for the return of the old soldier with his companion of the way, while his uncle, from time to time, addressed to him a brief adjuration, "Not to be a fool, and throw away fortune and happiness;" or, "Not to cast all the advantages, which God had given him, into the lap of those who had played so foul a game, to wring them from him."

In a few minutes the door from the ante-room opened again; and Chasseron entered, followed by Estoc. The old commander, in whom age and infirmity could scarcely tame the eager but generous impetuosity of disposition which had characterised him through life, rose up from his chair to greet their new guest and begin the subject at once. But Estoc thrust him down again, with unceremonious affection, saying, "Sit down, sir, sit down. You have been too much on your legs to-day already. You will have your wound breaking out again, especially if you

tease yourself so. Monsieur de Chasseron knows all about it. But there is more going on down below. Master Chazeul has just come down from a conference in the count's chamber, and has sent off Etienne on horseback to his mother, begging her to be here at an early hour to-morrow."

"Ay, Jacqueline must have a finger in the affair!" cried the commander; "and she will outwit us all, if we do not mind."

"I do not think so, sir," replied Chasseron, who by this time was seated between the old officer and his nephew. "It seems to me that the matter is very simple. Monsieur de Montigni, this worthy gentleman having known and heard something of me in times of yore, has thought fit to tell me the situation in which you are placed, and to ask my advice. I knew something of the facts before; for, in the first place, I was well acquainted with the good Count de Marennes; nay, poor as I am, was somewhat related to him—in a very distant degree, it is true; but still he was not above acknowledging the connection. In the next place, as you may perhaps have remarked, I live with my eyes and my ears open; and as I have been in this neighbourhood at least within fifteen leagues for some time, I have heard a good deal of what is going on. If, therefore, my counsel or assistance can do you any service, command it; for I owe you a good turn for that which you rendered me this morning. *Parbleu*, I should have been badly off if you had not come up."

"You are very welcome, my good sir," replied De Montigni; "and as my uncle has told you the circumstances, there is no use in entering upon them again. There are other things, however, to be taken into consideration, which you cannot yet know; I mean my own particular views and notions—"

"Ay!" cried the old commander, interrupting him, "the boy is fool enough, Monsieur de Chasseron, to talk of yielding to the wishes of these people, to think of abandoning all his rights, giving up to that coxcomb Chazeul both bride and estates! What think you of that? of letting them win the day by all their tricks and manœuvres? He has gone mad, I think! but *ventre bleu*! it shall not be so; for I will plead first myself. I renounced in favour of poor Louise, who had the next right after me, not of Madame Jacqueline, who has got too much already."

De Montigni coloured slightly at his uncle's words, but he replied calmly and affectionately: "I have my own reasons, my dear sir, if you will but hear them. All the gifts of fortune are but as we estimate them; I will not pretend that I am without ambition, still less that to obtain the heart

of Mademoiselle d'Albret I would not make any sacrifice. But I do not court her hand without her heart; and no consideration shall tempt me to cause her unhappiness by opposing her marriage, if—and I have no reason to doubt it—she feels towards my cousin of Chazeul, as a woman should feel towards the man on whom she is about to bestow her hand."

"That, young gentleman, is the question," said Chasseron quickly, while the old commander gave way to many a "Psha!" and other less decent interjection. "You have been ill used; and, evidently with a design of bringing about a marriage contrary to the previous contract between the lady's father and your uncle, you have been kept at a distance, in ignorance of all the facts, while opportunity has been given to Monsieur de Chazeul to seek the lady's affections."

"To be sure!" cried the commander, "it was all done on purpose!"

"Under these circumstances," continued Chasseron, without noticing the interruption, "you would be perfectly justified in opposing the marriage; and with the evidence of your uncle here, of the previous contract, I do not scruple to say, it could not proceed. I applaud your delicacy and generosity, however; but the utmost that could be expected from the most noble-minded man would be, that you should insist upon the delay of a year, with full opportunity of seeking to change the lady's views, reserving to yourself the power to enforce or renounce your rights, as you may find her affected."

"But, sir—but, sir!" cried the commander.

Chasseron, however, waved his hand, saying, "Hear me out, my good friend," and then continued: "This would be the kind and generous course, even if you found that Mademoiselle d'Albret was a willing party to this alliance. The first question is, however, whether she be really so or not? How can you tell that she does not consent with reluctance? How do you know, that she has not also been deceived? May she not have been taught to think, that her marriage with your cousin is in accordance with her father's designs? or even if no fraud has been played upon her, may she not have yielded from obedience to her guardian, knowing the power of those who hold, under the king, the *garde noble* of a female orphan? may she not even now, long for deliverance, and may she not bless you, if you step in armed with power to save her? Nay, more," he added with a smile, "may she not love you already?"

The colour rose warmly into De Montigni's cheek; and his heart beat quick; "Oh no, no," he cried, "I cannot hope such happiness. She was young, very young, when I went;

not yet fifteen. We always loved each other, it is true ; but as mere children."

"Love is a fruit that matures itself without the sunshine," replied Chasseron in a meaning tone, and then added frankly, "In a word, Monsieur de Montigni, I think it is so. I would not delude you with false hopes and expectations. That would be a bad return for the service you have rendered me; but I have known something of women, and I have in this case watched the lady accurately; not a glance of her eye has escaped me, not a varying shade of colour in her cheek. I think she loves you, I think she has now discovered it; and that, if you could see her at this moment, you would behold her weeping bitterly in her chamber over her hard fate. I think all this; but of one thing I am certain; if she have to-morrow to choose between you and Chazeul, she will not hesitate one moment, and her hand is yours."

The sensations of Louis de Montigni at that moment would be impossible to describe and difficult to conceive. Hope, joy, expectation, rose up to struggle in his breast, with sorrow, doubt, and apprehension. He dared not trust himself to the full tide of satisfaction and love. He felt it impossible to believe that such happiness might be in store for him; and contrasted with the dark and bitter feelings which had lately possessed him, the dream of happiness which now presented itself, though one which he had more than once indulged before, seemed too much for the lot of any mortal creature. A few moments' reflection, however, showed him that even if all that Chasseron said was true—if the brightest hope of his heart were realised and the love of Rose d'Albret were truly his, there were still difficulties and dangers enough in the way, to mingle a full portion of bitter with the cup of human joy. Obstacles innumerable presented themselves to his imagination; and it seemed to his inexperienced mind almost impossible to triumph over the impediments which might arise to bar the path to happiness.

His uncle and Chasseron sat gazing at him for a few moments, while he remained in silence, meditating over the present and the future. The old commander could not comprehend his feelings; but Chasseron, with clearer eyes, read as if in a book all the varied emotions of his heart, as they were written on his changing countenance. He suffered him then to reflect without interruption, till at length the young nobleman replied, "God send that it may be as you suppose! If it be so, sir, the decision of my conduct will be easy, for nothing but the belief that I should be wounding the feelings or opposing the happiness of Mademoiselle d'Albret could prevent me from putting in

my claim to her hand. But if I thought that she had one doubt or hesitation in regard to this marriage, that her whole heart did not go with it, that she only consented at the command of her guardian, and not from her own inclination, I would preserve every right I have, for her sake as well as for my own."

"Why, I tell you, boy, they have driven her," cried his uncle, "they have coaxed, and laboured, and striven, for these last two years. They have made her believe that my brother Anthony has the full and entire disposal of her, that she is but as his horse, or his ox, or any other of his goods and chattels, which he can give, or sell, or exchange at his will and pleasure."

"That error may be soon proved," exclaimed De Montigni.

"Nay," said Chasseron, before he proceeded, "perhaps not so easily as you imagine. Depend upon it, these artful people, with power in their hands, will take good care that you have no opportunity of speaking with her alone, if they can help it. You have the means, however, of driving them to it, if you use them skilfully. Let them think that your decision entirely depends upon her—"

"I have told them so already," replied De Montigni.

"So far so good," continued Chasseron; "but keep to your text: refuse to discuss the subject with them at all, till you have ascertained her views. Demand an hour's private interview with her; and adhere firmly to that condition. Let it take place, also, in some spot where you cannot be overheard—"

"The rampart is the only place," said Estoc; "on the west side there are no windows, and I will plant myself at the door so as to ensure there be no interruption."

"There be it, then," said Chasseron; "and this once gained, the decision of your fate is in your own hands. You may gain the day, too, if you like; only remember, listen to no arguments, enter into no conversation upon any part of the subject; but merely say that, when Mademoiselle d'Albret, unconstrained and free, assures you fully, with her own lips, in a private conference, that her happiness depends upon your making this renunciation of your rights, you are ready to do so, but not till then. Doubtless, they will tutor her—doubtless, they will endeavour to work upon her mind by every argument and inducement—and many may be devised which we cannot foresee—but you, on your part, must use your opportunity to the best advantage: press her home with all the words of love and passion, call to her mind the days gone by, the scenes, the

affections of childhood; show her how shamefully you have been deceived; let her know the frauds which have been put upon herself. Make her comprehend that it was for you she was destined by her father; and, if you will, let her know your generous intentions; tell her that for her happiness you are ready to sacrifice not only your rights and your inheritance, but even herself. Then, *parbleu!* if you do not win her, you are better without her."

The old commander rubbed his hands, exclaiming, "He will win her, he will win her! Don't be afraid; she is quite ready to be won. She loves him already, man, she always has loved him; only the poor little soul did not understand what it was."

"But suppose," said De Montigni in a musing tone, "suppose all this takes place as we would have it; suppose I am blessed to the utmost of my hopes and beyond my deserts, that I find her willing to be mine, unwilling to be his, what is the next step to be taken?"

"Ay, that is the question," replied Chasseron, "and one not very easy to resolve. I will give you my opinion fairly, though it may be wrong. However, you may follow it or not as you like. Bold measures are fitted for dangerous circumstances; and deceit, such as has been used towards you, will justify you in employing means which, were it otherwise, I would not advise and you ought not to follow. If you find her disposed to give her hand to you and you make open and decided opposition to the scheme which they themselves have devised, a thousand to one you will be driven out of the château, and all the influence of her guardian, even to compulsion itself, may perhaps be used to force her into a marriage with your rival. In the present condition of the country, it will be difficult to enforce your rights so long as she remains here; by no means difficult for them in the course of a year or two, to drive her, by persecution, into the arms of a man she hates. I would advise you, then, all these things considered, not to let them fully know all that takes place between you. Give no decided answer the moment your interview is over; but say they shall know your resolution on the following day. Take advantage of the time; and, having gained her consent and arranged your plan, fly with her at once to the camp of the king. Beyond all doubt Henry, as soon as he is informed of her father's intentions regarding you, will bestow her hand upon you. He is a good-humoured man enough; frank and free; and has a weakness for all love affairs. He will be glad enough, too, to secure the support of the houses of De Montigni and Marennès to his own cause; for at present he is a king without a kingdom; a soldier

without money; and, by my faith, too, a husband without a wife. However, you need not fear his taking yours, for they do say he is over head and ears in love just now with another person; otherwise I would not answer for him."

De Montigni smiled: "You are no courtier, Monsieur Chasseron," he said, "and your plan suits me well; but there may be difficulties in the execution."

"Pooh, boy! None, none," cried his uncle; "the business will be quite easy. Here are old Estoc and I as full of stratagems as the Duchess of Montpensier. We have had all our cunning bottled up for these ten years since I got that cursed wound; and we'll arrange between us a plan for getting you all out of the château so that no one shall know anything about it for eight hours at least. The king is besieging Dreux they say; and you can soon reach his camp."

"But can I persuade Rose to consent?" asked De Montigni.

"To be sure, to be sure," answered the old commander; "when she sees that there is nothing else for it, she won't hesitate. Besides, your taking her off to the king's camp, is not as if you were running away with her to marry her without any authority."

"Certainly not," said Chasseron; "remember to impress that upon her mind: first, that it is according to her father's own disposition, that she gives you her hand; secondly, that the king's right to the guardianship of a noble ward, is paramount to that of your uncle, and quite supersedes it."

"And you think," asked De Montigni, "that I may be perfectly sure of Henry's conduct?"

"Perfectly," replied Chasseron.

"I will be answerable for that," said the commander in a grave and emphatic tone. "I will pledge my honour, which was never yet forfeit, that His Majesty shall bestow upon you the hand of Rose d'Albret, as soon as you reach his camp, and all the circumstances are explained to him."

"Well, then," said De Montigni, "my course is clear, and my conduct decided. If the hopes that you have raised prove just, and that sweet girl consents, we will fly as has been proposed. If not, and I am disappointed, I will make the renunciation which is demanded of me, raise my own retainers, join the king, and, fighting for my lawful sovereign, will wed myself to honour as my only bride."

"I trust, sir," said the good farmer, "you may ere long be able to serve the Bearnois, as they call him, not only with your own retainers, but with those of Marennès and Liancourt too."

"God send it—God send it!" cried the commander; "and I will get into the saddle, too, if the devil were in my hip instead of a pistol ball. Come along, Estoc; you and I will go and lay out a plan for carrying off the lady, and I will let Louis know the result to-morrow by daybreak:—But mind you do your part well, my boy. No shyness—no diffidence—go right to the point at once. Tell her all about it, and let her judge for herself. Now, Monsieur de Chaseron, Estoc and I will see you to your room," and thus saying, they took leave of De Montigni, and retreated for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEETING ON THE RAMPARTS ARRANGED.

WE must now give a space, a very short space indeed, to Rose d'Albret, who, after speaking a few moments with her uncle, the priest, and Chazeul, had retired to her own chamber in search of solitary meditation. There, however, she found her maid waiting for her, it having been her custom for some weeks, since Chazeul had taken up his residence at the château, to quit the rest of the party as soon after supper as possible.

"There, take off this stiff gown, Blanchette; give me a dressing-gown, undo and comb my hair; and then you may go and gossip with Monsieur de Montigni's servants. They have just come from Italy, and will tell you, I don't doubt, how much prettier the girls of France are than those on the other side of the Alps. I will undress myself, when I feel sleepy."

"Indeed, mademoiselle, I don't want to gossip with them," said Blanchette; "if I talk with anybody, it shall be with Alphonso, Monsieur de Chazeul's head valet. He is a fine man, and a gay one, like his master. Ay, indeed, Monsieur de Chazeul is something like a man."

Rose d'Albret turned suddenly towards her, and fixed her eyes upon her face, asking, "How much has he given you, Blanchette?"

"Lord, mademoiselle!" cried the girl, turning crimson.

"Yes, Blanchette, I wish to know," said Rose; "tell me exactly how much he has given you. These fine gentlemen think that a lady's heart can never be won rightly without bribing her maid; and therefore, just in proportion to the number of crowns you have received, I shall judge that Mon-

sieur de Chazeul values my love. I am quite serious, so mind you reckon up exactly."

The girl evidently did not clearly see whether her mistress spoke ironically or not, but the tone of Rose d'Albret was so serious, that she inclined to the latter opinion, and answered hesitatingly, "Why, of course, mademoiselle, he has given me some little presents at different times, as all gentlemen do when they are in love."

"Little presents!" cried Rose in the same tone, "why, then, he values me little. But count up, count up, Blanchette, how much altogether."

"Why, may be, perhaps a hundred crowns in the whole, mademoiselle," answered the maid.

"A hundred crowns!" cried Rose d'Albret, "I am worth more than that; and I'll tell you what, Blanchette, you are a great fool if ever you say a word in his favour again, unless he gives you treble as much. So you look to it, undo my hair, and make haste."

The girl obeyed the orders she received, and then, by her mistress's direction, left her. The moment she was gone, however, Rose shook her head sadly, and burst into tears, exclaiming, "Alas, that they should thus fill me with suspicion! I am bought and sold like the goods of a market. No one comes near me that is not bribed or corrupted by some means. I have nowhere to turn for advice or sympathy or consolation. What is the meaning of all this? Am I to believe that it is poor Rose d'Albret he seeks? No, no, he would take other means to win love, if love were all he wanted. But I will know, I will see into the bottom of his heart before I give him my hand. Give him my hand! Oh God! to think that the day is coming so soon! But I will have some better insight; and if they use such art with me, surely I may be excused for practising some with them."

Rose d'Albret leaned her head upon her hand, and thought long and bitterly; but her mind was now pursuing another course; the image of De Montigni had risen up before her. Nor would it be banished, though she was afraid to look upon it steadily. "He is very little changed," she said to herself; "I can trace all the features of the boy in the man. He has lost his gay, light-hearted laugh, however—his cheerful look that spread light around him. He has grown grave and stern. Can he have suffered? Disappointed love, perhaps, has done its sad work upon his heart. Oh, that I could comfort him!"

She thought again, and other images seemed to present themselves; for, after a moment's silent musing, she started up,

crying, "God forbid! God forbid! Ah! what would come of it, if it were so? Ruin, destruction, desolation to all perhaps! Would I had resisted firmly from the first! Yet I have promised nothing. I have been but passive in the hands of others. I have heard my fate announced, and made no answer. 'Tis a vain fancy after all. He hardly spoke to me, looked cold and askance—perhaps he is offended—no, not offended; grieved, mortified, disappointed, perhaps. Heaven! where are my fancies leading me? And yet I often thought when my eyes met his, that there was a look of tenderness, almost of pity in his face, mournful yet affectionate. Would that I knew what is passing in his heart! Yet what would it avail? I know not. It might perhaps avail to save us both from misery—or plunge us into greater. 'Tis useless to think of such things. I will leave fate to take its course, and shape my own as opportunity occurs. But I may at least strive to gain some knowledge of this man's character and objects; and, if I do assume a spirit different from my own to fathom the depth of his, surely it may be forgiven when the cause is so powerful. I fear—I much fear that I am wedding cold deceit, and treachery, and wretchedness. I will sooner die first—sooner resign all I have, hide me in a convent, if needs must be, and spend my life in prayer. But I will read his heart first. Perhaps I do him wrong. His motives may be generous and noble for aught I know; and yet I cannot but doubt it. If they were so, why such shrewd steps to surround me by those who do nought but praise him? There is a want of truth and nature in it, that brings suspicion whether I will or not. De Montigni's very coldness has more of love in it. De Montigni, what can have changed him so? I'll find some means of speaking to him, and, if I can, will give him consolation. He used to love me much when we were both young; and, if he have any deep grief at his heart, it will soothe and comfort him to hear words of sympathy from the lips of Rose d'Albret. I loved him, too, always; and I could love him still—if it were right."

But there she paused, and would not think how much she might love him. She was like a child who comes to the precipice's edge, peers over, and runs away in haste, lest he should see the full danger, and, with giddy brain, fall over.

"Hark," she continued, "there is Chazeul singing in the rooms below. I will put out the light, and hie to bed. He is like the night-raven that fancied himself a nightingale. But I can stop my ears;" and, undressing hastily, she retired to bed: but sleep was far from her; and for many an hour she lay revolving plans of what she would

say and do on the morrow. Still, thoughts she was afraid of would intrude; still, before she was aware of it, her fancy was busy with De Montigni: still her repugnance to the union with Chazeul grew more and more strong, and it was not till half the night was spent, that at length she closed her eyes in sleep. She heard Blanchette come late into the anteroom where the maid's bed was placed; she heard her breathe hard soon after, in the dull sleep of selfish content; she heard sound after sound in the château, indicating that all were seeking repose; and at length, when every other noise was still, the deep bell of the clock first striking one, then two. But the third hour did not find her senses waking.

It was daylight the next morning, though it was her habit to rise early, when her maid called her; and Rose at once perceived that there was a tale behind the meaning look on the girl's face. "Well, Blanchette," she said, "what is it? You have got something to tell. Speak it quickly, girl, I do not love to wait."

"Ah, seigneur! mademoiselle," replied the maid, "I have heard such high words just now in the hall between the count, and Monsieur de Chazeul, and Monsieur de Montigni."

The colour fled from the cheek of Rose d'Albret; but she strove hard to ask in a calm and indifferent tone, what the dispute was about.

"That I cannot tell, mademoiselle," replied the girl, who, like so many people in her station, only gathered sufficient information to alarm, but not enlighten. "All I know is, Monsieur de Liancourt looked very angry, and spoke very high, and the marquises too; and Monsieur de Montigni replied coldly to my lord, saying, 'I must hear that from her own lips, sir, with no one present to restrain her.' But when Monsieur de Chazeul said something I did not hear, the baron turned upon him like a lion, and answered, 'Silence, sir! or I shall forget you are my cousin. You have heard my answer. Be it as you like. I seek not the conference you seem so afraid to grant, but without it, I sign away no right that I possess;' and then the marquises replied, with a scornful air, 'You are mistaken, sir; I fear no conference between a lady who loves me and a boy like you. There is no great rivalry to dread. So, to keep peace in the house, you shall have this interview, and that right soon;' and then he turned round and came towards the door, behind which I stood, and so I came away."

"Hark!" cried Rose d'Albret, "there is some one knocking at the ante-chamber door, see who is there! Say I am not dressed, but will be so soon."

"It is Monsieur de Chazeul, mademoiselle," exclaimed the girl, after going out and returning; "he bade me tell you that the weather has grown warmer, the frost gone, and the morning is fair and sunshiny, if when you are dressed, you will join him on the ramparts, for he wishes to speak with you."

Rose laid her hand upon her brow, thought for a moment, and then exclaimed, "I will go. Quick, dress me, Blanchette. I will go."

Her toilet was concluded much sooner than usual; and in a short time, avoiding the great hall, she was gliding along with a palpitating heart and unsteady step, by a passage which led direct to the walls. Before she opened the door between the house and the rampart, however, Rose d'Albret paused and meditated for a moment, pressed her hand upon her side as if to stop the beating within, and then saying, "So—so shall it be," she went out.

Chazeul was walking away from her, towards the end; but he turned the next moment, and as soon as he saw her, hastened his pace to meet her. Rose advanced deliberately, but was not a little surprised, when, on coming near, Chazeul threw his arms round her and attempted to press his lips upon hers. She repelled him in a moment, with a look of indignant scorn, but the next instant she calmed the expression of her countenance, and said, "Nay, nay, Monsieur de Chazeul, you forget you are not my husband yet, and never may be. So take no liberties, I beg, or I go in this moment."

"And never may be!" cried Chazeul. "Oh, that is settled beyond all power of recall, sweet Rose. I have your guardian's promise, signed and sealed, dear lady, so that either Rose d'Albret is my wife or a cloistered nun for life."

"Well, that is one alternative, at all events, monsieur," she answered; "not a very pleasant one indeed, nor one that I am likely to adopt; but still, do not consider me as your wife, till I am so; and take no liberties, if you would have me stay with you."

"Nay, this is what all lovers take and grant," replied Chazeul; "however, be it as you will for the present, sweet Rose."

"Lovers!" repeated Mademoiselle d'Albret, "pray put the matter on its right footing, Chazeul. It is better that we should understand each other clearly. This proposed alliance is what is called a *mariage de convenance*. I look upon it as such; and so do you at your heart. I am not one to love easily. Doubtless I shall love my husband, when he is so; but in the mean time, all that either of us looks to is, a certain change in our position for the better. I view the

matter quite reasonably; and so do you, though you think it right to affect a little passion. Not that I am insensible to the advantage of having a handsome husband, of reputation and distinction; nor you to that of having a pretty and well dressed wife; but, as the principal question, there are higher points involved than mere inclination. Deal with me therefore candidly, Chazeul, and do not make the unnecessary attempt to deceive me with a show of passion that has nothing to do with the affair."

Had Rose d'Albret assumed a warmer tone, Chazeul might at once have suspected her; but her calm and reasoning manner was so consistent with his own notions, that he aided to deceive himself; and judging her cold, and incapable of any strong passion, felt more secure than ever of the success of his schemes.

"Well, Rose," he said, "I do love you, whatever you may think; and so do you love me, I believe. But to speak of these higher matters that you talk of: our marriage is certainly, under every consideration, the best devised alliance of the times. You know that the estates of Chazeul are very large, but still not large enough to give me that power and influence which I might obtain. The estates of Marennes are nearly equal; and therefore by my marriage with you, according to your father's and your guardian's wishes, I well nigh double my station and importance. But there is something more, dear Rose, in favour of this marriage; my generous uncle settles on me the whole estates of Liancourt, which add vast weight to all the rest, so that no member of the Holy Union—ay, hardly Mayenne himself—will be able to compete with me in wealth and influence. Splendour and power are before us, Rose, such as princes might envy; and there is but one difficulty."

"Ha! What is that?" cried his fair companion, in an eager tone.

"Why, it is this," replied the marquis, with some slight hesitation, "this boy, De Montigni, you know, has been sent for to sign the contract and the necessary papers. My uncle generously offers him, as his share of the inheritance, all the rich benefices at the disposal of the house of Liancourt. He may hold them, all but the bishopric, without entering the Church; but if he chooses to take that profession—and he is fit for nothing else—the bishopric can be easily secured to him also, and then his portion will be even larger in revenue than mine. It is necessary, however, in order to avoid after-litigation, that he should sign a renunciation in regard to the estates; but this he refuses to do till—"

"Offer him something more," cried Rose d'Albret, willing to try him thoroughly;

"give him the farm of Marcilly. You will scarcely miss it; and it will serve to make matters easy."

"It is a rich farm," answered Chazeul, shaking his head; "but that is not the question, Rose. He will not sign till he hears from your own lips, that it is your wish he should."

"I will speak to him," said the young lady. "I will speak to him directly."

"Nay, hear me first, sweet Rose," replied Chazeul. "Make your words short with him. Merely say, that this marriage having been decided and your hand promised to me, you are placed in a situation of great embarrassment by his conduct."

"I can say that with truth," answered Rose d'Albret; "but then," she added, "if I find he remains firm, may I not offer him Marcilly?"

"It is unnecessary," said Chazeul, with an impatient look; "for he has given his word, and will not break it, to sign the papers, if you but express a wish that he should."

"Oh, I cannot ask him," replied Rose d'Albret, "I cannot distinctly ask him, Monsieur de Chazeul."

"And pray why not?" demanded Chazeul, in some surprise.

"Oh, for many reasons, which I should think you would see at once," answered Mademoiselle d'Albret. "In the first place, it would be laying myself under an obligation which I may find it difficult to acquit. All I can do is to tell him truly what I feel, to tell him the embarrassment into which these events may cast me, and then to let him deliver me from them if he will."

"Ah! here comes father Walter," said Chazeul; but the announcement gave no pleasure to Rose d'Albret; for she felt that there would be more difficulty in concealing, from his eyes, what were the real feelings of her heart than from those of Chazeul, already blinded by his own self-confidence.

Happily for her, however, father Walter had fixed upon his own course; and trusting to the power which he had always possessed over her mind, he thought to bind her not by promises, but by principles, forgetting that when he himself favoured art and deceit, the slightest accident might discover the whole, and free her from the bonds which he strove to impose upon her. As he approached, he beckoned Chazeul apart, saying, "I have a message for you, Monsieur de Chazeul. Good morning, my daughter, I would speak a word or two with you in a moment—now Chazeul," he continued, when Rose had advanced a step or two, "what has been done?"

"She does not exactly promise," said Chazeul, "but she owns that his conduct

places her in circumstances of great embarrassment, and says she will tell him so—but I am sure she will do what we wish. However, perhaps it might be better to wait till my mother comes, before we grant him this interview."

"I do not know," replied the priest, thoughtfully; "if we do, it will be impossible to prevent De Montigni from having in the meantime some private conference with the good old commander, which he has not obtained as yet, for the old man is not yet up, and the young one is walking in the hall. But if they once meet to discuss this affair, the fact will come out, that Mademoiselle d'Albret was really destined by her father for your cousin. No one can tell what effect that may have upon her, and therefore, it may be better to let their conference take place before he knows it. Once get his signature, and the matter is irrevocable. At present he is only vaguely aware that he has a claim to the estates. He makes some merit, indeed, with her, of his willingness, for her happiness, to resign his right, but that will not at all counterbalance the impression we have produced on her mind that, in marrying you, she is fulfilling the wishes of her parents, and the engagements that they had made. We had every right, indeed, to produce such an impression; for the moment that De Montigni renounces the estates in your favour, you become the person pointed out in the contract."

"Pshaw! never mind whether it is right or wrong," replied Chazeul; "so that the end be gained. But I see what you mean: you are right, we must get the interview over, before he gains further information. Then, his word once given, he will not shrink from it. I am sure she will do it, though she says that she cannot distinctly ask him to consent, or lay herself under an obligation to him."

"That is all the better," replied the priest; "had she promised too much I might have doubted, from what I saw last night; but now go you to your uncle and make sure that there is no speech between De Montigni and the commander; and I will confirm her in her intentions, as I well know how. I will join you in ten minutes, and then you can send De Montigni up here."

Thus saying, they parted; and, with his usual slow and deliberate step, the priest advanced to the spot where Mademoiselle d'Albret was walking thoughtfully along the battlements.

"There is a question I wish to ask you, good father," said Rose, beginning the conversation herself, in order to guide it in the direction she thought best; "and I beg you would answer me frankly. My maid tells me, that she overheard high words this

morning between De Montigni and my guardian. What were they about?"

"Truly, daughter," replied the priest, well-pleased that she had brought forward the subject at once, "I cannot tell you exactly what took place, for I was not present. But I know that the conduct of Monsieur de Montigni is giving the count great pain, alienating his affection from him, and, unless something is done to convince him how wrong he is, I fear we shall have scenes of quarrelling and confusion, the curse of long and tedious lawsuits, ay, and perhaps, even bloodshed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Rose, with unaffected horror. "Ah! that is very terrible. How can we stop it, good father? What is the cause of all this?"

The priest was well satisfied to see the immediate effect his words produced. "No one can stop it, my dear child," he replied, "unless it be yourself. I believe your entreaties would have more effect upon the mind of Monsieur de Montigni than those of anyone; and if you fail, matters must take their course. But, at all events, if you exert yourself to restore peace, you will have the blessed satisfaction of having done your duty. The case is this, my child," he continued, before Rose could reply; "You are bound to give your hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, by all those obligations which must be most imperative upon a woman of good feeling and good principles. Your uncle is bound, also, by the tenor of his contract with your father, to secure to this, your future husband, the estates of Liancourt; for that purpose, and to avoid contentions and lawsuits, it is necessary that Monsieur de Montigni should make a renunciation of any claims, real or imaginary, to those estates. To take from him all cause for complaint, your guardian has most generously consented to give him revenues, to an equal amount, from other sources, and that immediately. But Monsieur de Montigni resists, talks high and loud, and the only thing that seems to have any effect upon him is, the thought of distressing you, who were brought up with him as a sister."

Rose paused thoughtfully for a few moments, really moved and affected; and the priest, who watched each change of her countenance with keen and practised eyes, fully believed that he had gained the day. That supposition was confirmed, when she said, in a low and agitated voice, "Send him to me, good father, send him to me!"

"I will, my dear daughter," answered the priest; "for I feel almost sure that you will be able to persuade him to a nobler and more generous line of conduct. I need use no exhortations to you, daughter, to exert

your greatest influence to restore peace in this family; but let me say, that for such an object, you may be well justified in overstepping, in some degree, the bounds which a timid and delicate woman generally prescribes to herself. For this high purpose, you may well urge him more warmly and vehemently than you might otherwise think reasonable and proper, and may hold out to him the inducement of contributing to your happiness and peace, with a view to restore tranquillity and comfort in a house where you have always been treated as a daughter."

"Send him to me, good father," repeated Rose d'Albret. "I know not what I shall say or do, to effect the purpose desired; but in former days De Montigni was always generous and self-denying; and if I can restore peace without any act of injustice, no personal act of sacrifice on my part will seem too much for me to make."

She spoke sincerely, with all her previous thoughts and feelings thrown into confusion; and, with a pale cheek and a trembling frame she seated herself upon the parapet, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"I will send him this moment, my child," replied the priest, convinced even by her visible agitation, that he had produced the effect he had desired.

"Stay, stay a moment," said the fair girl in a faltering tone; "I am troubled, father; let me recover myself for a moment."

"As long as you will," replied the priest, "but the sooner such a painful scene is over the better."

"Now," said Rose d'Albret, after a short pause, "now, good father; and let him be quick, for I fear my courage will fail."

"God's blessing go with your good work!" cried father Walter, and with a low inclination of the head he retired.

At a rapid pace he sought the great hall, where he found Monsieur de Liancourt seated at a table, and pretending to write a letter, though the agitated shaking of his hand prevented him from tracing more than one or two words in a minute. De Montigni was walking up and down on the other side, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon the ground; and Chazeul was standing, playing with the hilt of his sword, near the door which led to the ramparts.

"All is right and safe," said the priest in a low voice to the marquis as he entered. "He has not seen the commander?"

"No, no," whispered Chazeul; "but the old man must be down soon. He is later than usual."

"The change of weather always affects his wounds," replied the priest; "but the sooner this is over the better. Monsieur de

Montigni," he continued, crossing the hall, "Mademoiselle d'Albret wishes to speak with you on the ramparts."

"Very well," replied De Montigni, advancing towards the door. But pausing in the midst of the hall, and drawing up his head proudly, he added, gazing first at Monsieur de Liancourt, then at Chazeul, "Remember, gentlemen, I am to have one hour unwatched, unlistened to, unrestrained—ay, and uninterrupted; and if, in that time, Mademoiselle d'Albret distinctly asks me to sign these papers, I will do it before noon to-morrow. That is our compact."

"So be it," answered the count; and Chazeul bent his head with a sarcastic smile.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOVERS MEET.

THE heart of poor Rose d'Albret beat so fast as she sat upon the battlements, leaning her head and arm upon the stone-work of one of the embrasures, that she feared she would faint before De Montigni appeared. She longed eagerly to think over all that had taken place that morning, over her own sensations, over her past, over her future conduct. But her ideas were all in wild confusion; and she could not command her mind sufficiently to give them anything like order and precision. In a few minutes, however, she heard a step; and looking round towards the door which led across the drawbridge into the château, she saw De Montigni advancing towards her with a quick pace. She trembled to meet him, but yet as she gazed there was nothing stern or harsh or cold in his countenance. It was somewhat grave, perhaps; but still there was a light in his eyes, a look of hopefulness and satisfaction. It was more like that of the youth, who had left her five years before, than it had appeared since his return; and, as he came near he held out his hand towards her, saying, "Rose!—dear Rose!"

She could not resist the tone and the manner; but starting up at once, she placed both her hands in his, while the warm blood of emotion mounted up into her cheeks and forehead, and made her whole face one glow. The next moment her eyes were drowned in tears; but De Montigni, without noticing them, drew her arm through his, and led her towards the farther part of the rampart, while good old Estoc, with a heavy sword by his side, appeared upon the flying bridge, and leaned over the chains, looking into the space below.

"Dry your tears, dearest Rose," said De Montigni; "dry your tears, and calm your heart, and listen with your whole mind to one who has always loved you, as a boy, as a youth, as a man—one who is ready at your slightest word to make any or every sacrifice, but to procure you one moment's happiness."

"Oh, De Montigni!" exclaimed Rose d'Albret, "do not speak to me so tenderly, do not speak to me so kindly, or any little calmness, any little power over my mind that I may hope to possess, will be lost altogether."

"Nay, that must not be, Rose," replied De Montigni; "I have need of your full attention, dearest Rose, and I have not come here to agitate or afflict you. I have sought this interview that we may understand each other clearly and fully, or rather, that I may know and be quite sure that, in anything I do, I am really consulting your wishes and your happiness, and that you are not deceived, as I have been, in regard to the circumstances of your position."

"Alas, De Montigni!" answered his fair companion, "I fear no explanation can deliver me from the terrible embarrassment in which I am placed. Indeed, indeed, I know not which way to turn or what to do. I would give worlds, I would do anything, to restore peace to this family; but I have no right to ask you to make sacrifices, I have no right to injure or to distress you."

"Talk not of sacrifices, Rose," replied De Montigni in a mournful tone; "talk not of sacrifices to me. I am ready to make any, *all* for your dear sake. You have nothing to do but to command, and I will obey; but it is upon the sole condition that I know it to be for your happiness; and first, Rose, let me beseech you to tell me, how you conceive you stand regarding this marriage."

"I do not understand you," replied Mademoiselle d'Albret; "how do you mean, De Montigni?"

"We have but an hour, Rose, for all that we have to say," answered De Montigni, "therefore forgive me if I ask you plain and straightforward questions upon subjects into which I have, perhaps, no right to inquire; and answer me candidly and frankly—I know you will. First, dearest Rose, is it love, or what you consider duty, that binds you to Nicholas de Chazeul?"

"Duty, duty," replied Rose d'Albret eagerly; then placing her hand upon her brow, she thought for an instant, and added with a melancholy shake of the head, "Love? Ah, no! Alas, love has little to do with it, on either side!"

"Then almost all my questions are answered, Rose," replied De Montigni, taking her hand and pressing it in his own.

"Nay, do not, do not, Louis," said his fair companion; "you agitate, you alarm me. I must do my duty, De Montigni; I have promised to endeavour to restore peace to this household. Remember, I must obey—I must fulfil the engagement entered into by my father."

"Then, Rose Albret," replied the young nobleman, "you are the bride of Louis de Montigni, and not of Nicholas de Chazeul: the bride of one who has loved you from infancy, not of a cold and heartless villain, who loves nothing but himself."

Rose d'Albret turned, withdrew her arm, and gazed upon him for a moment in pale and speechless astonishment. The next moment her lips too turned white, and she would have fallen had not her lover caught her in his arms.

Poor De Montigni knew little of woman's heart, and could ill distinguish between the effects of mere emotion and distress. He carried rather than led her to the side of the wall, and seating her in one of the embrasures, hastened to reassure her, as he thought.

"Listen to me, Rose, listen to me, dearest girl," he said; "De Montigni is not about to take advantage of any circumstances of his situation. It is for you, as I said just now, to command, and for me to obey. I am ready at a word to renounce my inheritance, my rights, my hopes—yes, Rose, even you yourself—if it be necessary for your happiness—I forgive you for having deceived me but now. If you now answer that you love this man, I am willing, ready to renounce all, even my newly awakened joy, that you may be at peace. I shall soon find repose on some field of battle."

"I have promised nothing," murmured Rose d'Albret to herself; "thank God, I have promised nothing! I have acquiesced in what they told me was a duty—nothing more—oh, no, no, thank God, I have done no more;" and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

After a moment, however, she dried them suddenly and looked up. "What was it you said, De Montigni?" she cried; "tell it me again! It seems like a dream. Tell it me again. Surely you said I was not doomed to wed Chazeul!"

Louis de Montigni gazed upon her with a look in which surprise, and joy, and thankfulness gradually rose up like the increasing flame upon an altar. "Oh, Rose," he said, "your words give me life. I did say you were not doomed to wed Chazeul. Your fate depends upon your own decision, and upon my actions, which your decision will rule. Listen to me, dear one, and I will in a few short words explain all. We shall have much to speak of afterwards, so mark

well every point. My uncle, the commander, will confirm all I say if you doubt me."

"Doubt you, De Montigni? Doubt you?" asked Rose d'Albret, extending her hand to him. "I'd sooner doubt myself. But speak, Louis, speak. What have you to tell?"

"A brief tale, but a sad one," answered De Montigni. "In years long gone, your guardian, the count, being then married to your aunt, and childless, the good old commander made a renunciation, on my father's marriage, of all his claims to the estates of Liancourt in my mother's favour. I became, therefore, the presumptive heir; and your good father entered into a contract with my uncle, the count, by which, in case of his death, you were to become the ward of Monsieur de Liancourt, and to wed the nephew to whom his estates naturally descended. Since then, I find, the count has been persuaded by some persons—my aunt Jacqueline de Chazeul, I believe, and I fear the priest also—to favour a scheme for substituting Chazeul in place of myself. The particulars of the contract have been kept secret from you and me. I have been sent afar till the whole plot was mature; you have been taught to consider yourself as the promised bride of another. My renunciation, however, was necessary, in order that, by rendering Chazeul the heir of the estates of Liancourt, it might give validity to your marriage with him, in the face of which stands my uncle's contract with your father so long as the estates are entailed upon me. For this purpose was I sent for from Italy, still kept in ignorance. But I had never forgotten Rose d'Albret. I shrunk from signing away my birthright without inquiry. Forgive me, Rose, forgive me, if I say I would have done anything to obstruct—ay, even to delay for a day or hour, your marriage with another. Then came the priest to talk with me; and from him—by a slip of the tongue, I believe—I learned my claim to the estates. In a private interview with my uncle, the commander, I learned my whole rights, and the contract signed by your father. The whole villainous scheme was, in short, exposed; and from others rather than my own presumption, I learned to hope—what shall I say?—that Rose d'Albret might as willingly unite her fate with the companion of her girlhood, as with a man whom she must, when his fraud is all discovered, in some degree condemn. Yet still, Rose, still, if your heart leads you to wards him, speak but the word! De Montigni is yours: without you I am nothing—fortune, rank, hope, life itself, is an empty bubble. All shall be resigned at your first bidding; and to know I have made you

happy by my own wretchedness, shall be consolation of my remaining days, the one sole light of a dark existence, the friendly hand that closes my willing eyes in death. But if not—if you have been but constrained by a cold sense of duty—if you can find happiness with one who has always loved you—if you can give your heart in return for passion such as you deserve—oh Rose, oh my beloved!”

He held out his arms to her as he spoke; the wall shaded them from observation: he drew nearer, more near; and Rose d'Albret, with a cheek of crimson, and overflowing eyes, bent forward her head and sobbed upon his bosom.

“Thou art mine! thou art mine? Thou dearest and best beloved,” cried De Montigni, clasping her to his heart. “But hark!” he exclaimed, “there is the clock striking ten. We have but half an hour, Rose, to settle all our plans. Thou art mine, however; and it shall be a strong hand that tears thee from me.”

“But, oh, De Montigni,” exclaimed Rose d'Albret, withdrawing herself from his arms and looking up with apprehension in her face, “How will all this end? There will be strife—there will be bloodshed!”

“Fear not, dear one,” answered her lover. “It is that which I would fain avoid; and if Rose d'Albret will deign for the sake of De Montigni, to overstep some cold proprieties, to trust herself entirely to one in whom she has acknowledged she can confide, to fly to the court of the king with her promised, her contracted husband, all difficulties, all dangers will be at an end; and in our sovereign's presence, with all the nobility of France to witness, we will pledge our vows at the altar, let who will gainsay it.”

“To fly! Oh, Louis,” cried Rose d'Albret; but the next moment she bent down her eyes, placed her hand in his, and added in a low tone, “But I am yours. Do with me what you will. I know you would not wrong me.”

“Not for the joy of Heaven,” answered De Montigni. “But it is the only way, dear Rose, to avoid evils innumerable, strife, contention, and a thousand black and terrible things hidden from us by the dark curtain of the future. You must fly with me, dear Rose. You must fly with me this very night.”

“To night!” said the young lady; “to-night, Louis?” but, after a moment's thought, she continued, “Yet it must be so, I believe. To-morrow might be too late; and perhaps, they may not let me speak with you again, Louis.”

“If they discover the nature of our con-

versation most certainly they will not,” replied De Montigni; “but that we must conceal from them. I am not one to teach you deceit, dear Rose. God forbid that you should lose that bright candour which, to the mind, is what the hue of warmth and health is to the face. But these people have dealt wrongfully with you and me; to deliver you from their hands without long contention, there is but one way open; and we are not bound to reveal our plans and purposes, our views and feelings, to those who would misuse their knowledge.”

“But if they ask me?” said Rose d'Albret; “what can I do?—what can I say?”

“Say as little as possible, my beloved,” answered De Montigni. “Enter into no particulars; merely tell them that you found me very resolute; but add, that my decision must rest with myself, after what you have said, and that you believe, upon due consideration of all the circumstances, I will do what is right. Be sure too, dear Rose, that you may safely say so; for I will do what is right to the utmost. Then if they try to investigate more closely, boldly refuse to answer. Say that, to tell them all the words which passed between us would be to betray my confidence, and you will not do it. Let them not lead you on from one thing to another, but keep your reply to as simple a statement as possible.”

“I will! I will!” replied Rose d'Albret; “I know the danger of suffering them to entangle me in explanations or discussion.”

“And particularly beware of the priest,” added her lover. “He is not honest, Rose, and has made himself their tool.”

“I fear it is so,” answered the young lady. “Even now he tried to deceive me, and partly succeeded.”

“Let him not do so again, dear one,” said De Montigni; “but there is another person of whom you must likewise have a care. I mean Madame de Chazeul. She will be here soon, and though, perhaps, I judged harshly of her while I was a boy, I find my good uncle, the commander, her own brother, is but little more merciful to her character.”

“If she be coming, I will hide myself,” answered Rose. “Oh, she is a horrible woman! I always avoid her; I always abhor her company. I remember well things she has said that froze my blood. She scoffs at the very thought of goodness and honour; and with her serpent-tongue would have one believe, that no one is virtuous but in appearance; and yet I have heard her as bitter against others for light faults, as if she had none herself.”

“She is treacherous too as well as malevolent, I find,” replied De Montigni; “there-

fore avoid her to-day as much as possible, dearest."

"I have a bad headache, Louis, with all this agitation," said Rose; "but I am glad of it; for it will give me a fair excuse for lying down again. Burdened with the secret now in my bosom, I would not spend a day with that woman for the world. She would try all means to make me tell her everything that has passed or force me to a lie to conceal it."

"Perhaps your plan may be the best," rejoined De Montigni; "but remember, dear Rose, you will have to wake and rise an hour after midnight, to fly with him who loves you."

"But how, Louis, how?" asked Mademoiselle d'Albret. "Remember in these times the gates are guarded."

"All that is settled and laid out," replied her lover. "Only be ready, dear one, to come with me at the hour I name. Bring little with you; leave jewels and clothes and all behind. All I seek, all I desire, is Rose herself; and though, perhaps, amidst these contentions, your guardian may keep us long from our rights in your inheritance, yet De Montigni has enough for himself and her he loves; and I do not think that Rose will murmur at the want of splendour and high estate, if her heart be satisfied with its choice."

Rose d'Albret gazed at him with a bright smile, for she could not but contrast with pleasure, his thoughts with those of Chazeul. "I will be ready, Louis," she said, "and I will own, a crust of bread, with one who feels as you do, will be better to me than splendour and feasting with another. But there is one difficulty, Louis," she added suddenly, while the smile passed away, and a look of apprehension took its place. "What can I do with my maid, Blanchette? I thought the girl was honest and true, but these people have corrupted her. Everyone who approaches me seems to have been gained by some means; and, with those who have not been so gained they have long suffered me to have no private conversation. Even with the good old commander himself, since he returned hither from Paris, about two months ago, they have not allowed me to speak for a moment without someone being present. But Blanchette, what is to be done about Blanchette? She owned this morning that she had received bribes from Chazeul to a considerable extent."

De Montigni mused. "We must find some remedy, dear Rose," he replied, at length; "a person who has received one bribe will generally not refuse another, and I must try to outbid Chazeul. But why should she have any part in the affair? Why should she know it at all?"

"She sleeps in my anteroom," answered Rose d'Albret. "I cannot pass out without her hearing me."

"There is the window, dearest Rose," said her lover; "it is but a few feet above the wall; and we must try that if other resources fail. At all events be at the window at one. I will come to speak to you there, and tell you what is arranged. You must be quite ready, however, dearest Rose, for our safety may depend upon a moment."

"My heart sinks when I think of it," replied Rose d'Albret. "But yet, Louis—but yet, Louis," she answered, "I will not hesitate; for it is the only way to escape from a fate, of which I now feel, for the first time, all the wretchedness; but how shall I know when you are beneath the window?"

"I will reach up and knock with the point of my sword," answered De Montigni, "and then we must speak low, lest any one should hear. Hark! there are voices; the time, I suppose, is at an end. Adieu! dearest Rose, adieu! Be ready—pray be ready; for I feel sure that happiness will attend us. Nevertheless, let us now have grave and serious countenances; for we must not let them see that there are any warmer feelings in our hearts."

"I shall not find it difficult to look grave, Louis," replied the lady; "for it is a hard necessity that drives me to do that which I do. But, hark! they are surely quarrelling there!"

"'Tis Estoc will not suffer Chazeul to pass, I dare say," answered De Montigni.

"Go, Louis, go," cried Mademoiselle d'Albret; "for heaven's sake, do not let them dispute. Adieu! adieu!"

They were at this moment on a part of the walls which, running round from the draw-bridge we have mentioned, passed under a defence which was called *the cavalier*, and was concealed by it from the windows of the building, as well as from the bridge and the rest of the rampart. De Montigni felt strongly inclined to press his fair companion to his heart before he left her; but he wisely refrained, and looking up to the top of *the cavalier*, he had cause to be satisfied with his own self-command; for just above the parapet, he caught sight of part of a man's head, evidently watching them.

Taking Rose's hand, then, he bent his head over it, whispering, "We are watched, Rose; and, adding aloud, "Farewell, then, Mademoiselle d'Albret, I will consider all you have said," he took a step back, bowed low, and retired along the wall.

When he came within sight of the bridge, he found that, as he had supposed, the good old soldier had thrust himself right in the way of Chazeul, and holding his sheathed

sword in his left hand, seemed ready to draw it if the other attempted to pass him. Chazeul was in the act of turning to speak to some person behind, and De Montigni heard him exclaim aloud, "Call Monsieur de Liancourt!"

The moment, however, that Estoc caught sight of the young baron advancing rapidly along the wall, he dropped the sword back into its place, and suffered Chazeul to come forward. The cheek and brow of the latter were fiery red, and his eye flashing with anger, as he exclaimed,

"This is very modest and proper indeed, Monsieur de Montigni! Do you forget that you are in your uncle's château, that you thus set a guard upon his walls to prevent his family from passing?"

"To ensure, sir, that they keep their word with me," said De Montigni. "I am quite well aware that I have but little more right than yourself to command in this place; however, do not let us quarrel, Chazeul," he added with a serious air; "we have things of more serious consequence to think of—at least I have."

"I dare say you have," replied Chazeul with a triumphant smile, judging from his cousin's countenance that all things had gone according to his own wishes. "Well, what is the result of your conference?"

"Of that hereafter," answered De Montigni, passing on. "Nay, no words at present, good Estoc," he continued, seeing the old soldier eyeing Chazeul with an angry glance, "let the past be forgotten, if you would not grieve me."

"But one warning first to this young gentleman," said Estoc. "Do not use such words again to a French gentleman, Monsieur de Chazeul, for I give you fair notice, that, if I be the one on whom you spend them, I will send my sword through your body, as I have done to many a better man than yourself before now."

"You might not find me quite tranquil under such an honour, Master Estoc," replied Chazeul; "but I will take care that you shall be chastised for your insolence, by those whom it may better become to meddle with you:" and thus saying, he followed De Montigni over the bridge and through the passage into the hall.

To say the truth, the heart of Louis de Montigni was not quite at ease; for, how long he had been watched from the *cavalier*, and how much of what he had said had been overheard, he could not tell. The small part of the man's head which he had observed, did not enable him to judge who it was that had been playing the eavesdropper; and he more feared the priest than any one else. But when he entered the hall he found father Walter there, and his uncle absent; and,

the moment after, Monsieur de Liancourt himself appeared with an air of so much satisfaction, that De Montigni's apprehensions of discovery were at an end.

"Well, Louis," said the count, "I trust you are satisfied, and that you have made up your mind to yield all this idle resistance, and sign the papers at last with a good grace."

"I have promised my reply before noon to-morrow," replied De Montigni with a frown upon his brow; for he was not well pleased with the pitiful art which had been used towards him. "Before I sign anything, however, I must read the papers, and consider them well; it is but fair to know what I am asked to do."

"You are mightily long and deliberate, Monsieur de Montigni," said Chazeul; "I understood that you were to make up your mind by what Mademoiselle d'Albret thought fit to say. Now I will take it upon myself to affirm that she did ask you to sign them."

"You are wrong, Monsieur de Chazeul," replied his cousin, turning upon him sternly, "she did not."

"You are too frank and noble, my son, I am sure," observed father Walter, "to have recourse to an evasion; and we have every reason to suppose that, if the young lady did not actually ask you to put your hand to these documents, she did what was tantamount, and expressed some wish that it should be so."

"I have every reason to think so too," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "nay, indeed, I am sure of it. Come, Louis, be frank, and tell us what she did say upon the subject."

De Montigni mused for a moment, and then replied, "Our conversation was long, sir, and I have neither will nor power to repeat it all; but the only words which she used, that could at all bear the interpretation you would give to them, were, as far as I can remember them, these; That she would give worlds, she would do anything to restore peace to the family, but that she had no right to ask me to make sacrifices, or to injure or to distress me."

"I think nothing could be more plain," said father Walter; "surely, my son, you cannot pretend to misunderstand her meaning?"

"I do not pretend to misunderstand her at all, good father," answered the young nobleman; "and I am in no degree disposed to cavil or to evade. I will not be hurried, however, in any of my proceedings. By what Mademoiselle d'Albret judges best for her own happiness, I will be guided; and, as I said before, ere noon to-morrow I shall be prepared to act decidedly. In the meantime

I require to see these papers; and as, perhaps, it may be needful that I should have some one with me to explain to me, while reading them, anything I do not understand, I should wish uncle Michael, or father Walter here, or both, to be present with me while I look over them."

"Oh, father Walter by all means!" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "you know my brother Michael, though as good a soldier as ever lived, is nothing but a soldier. He does not understand these things at all."

"And I but little," rejoined the priest. "However, if Monsieur de Montigni is content that I should be his fellow-student, I am most willing to give him any explanation in my power."

"Madame de Chazeul is just coming into the court-yard, my lord," said a servant, hurrying up the hall and addressing Monsieur de Liancourt.

"I must go down to receive her," exclaimed the count. "Then it is understood, De Montigni, that you will read the papers with father Walter? Fix the hour yourself, and you shall have them."

Thus saying he hastened away; and, after a few minutes' more conversation with the priest, De Montigni went in search of his uncle, the commander, whom he found walking up and down the corridor. Father Walter remained for an instant talking to Chazeul, but the old commander had scarcely time to say to his nephew, "Well, boy, well, is all settled?" and De Montigni to answer, "To my heart's content, my dear uncle," when the step of Chazeul was heard approaching.

"Devil fly away with the fellow," said the old soldier: "when I found that you were with our dear little Rose, I got out of his way, for fear I should betray myself; and now here he comes again. Keep it close, Louis, keep it close! No stratagem ever succeeded but with a shut mouth. Ah, Chazeul! are not you going to see your mother? She is in the court they tell me."

"She will be here directly, sir," replied Chazeul, "then I shall see her;" and, attaching himself to their party, he remained for the evident purpose of preventing any private communication between them.

CHAPTER X.

HELEN DE LA TREMBLADE.

THOSE who have visited France in the present day, who have travelled over that rich

and fertile land from end to end, who have journeyed through its least frequented districts and examined into the nooks and corners which are but little exposed to the eye of the ordinary traveller, have yet, in general, but a very faint idea of the scene it presented at the period of which we write. Yet were they to bring history to aid their researches, from time to time, they would discover such fragments of a former day as might enable them to call up before their eyes a true picture of France during the wars of the League, as a Buckland or a Sedgwick, from the teeth and bones of long extinct animals, and from the leaves of trees that have decayed for thousands of years, are enabled to raise up from the waves of time an image of a by-gone world and people it with monstrous things, such as the eye of man probably never beheld in actual existence.

The whole country towards the end of the sixteenth century, torn with factions, desolated by rapine, stained with bloodshed, knew nought of commerce, manufactures, or arts; and even agriculture itself on which the daily support of the people depended, was accompanied with terror and danger. Thus hamlets and villages, through wide districts of the most fertile parts of France, were swept away or left vacant; the houses of the farmer and the labourer had grown few, and were sometimes defended with trenches and pallisades against any of the smaller bands that roved the country; the greater part of the population was gathered into fortified cities; and the rest of the kingdom was dotted with châteaux and *maisons fortes*, generally at a considerable distance from each other, often in the hands of opposite factions, and always prepared for stern resistance against the attack of an enemy.

In the part of the country of which we have been writing, these castles of the old feudal nobility were somewhat numerous; and we must now beg leave to remove the reader for a time from the Château de Marzay to that of Chazeul, which lay, as he has been already informed, at no great distance. We must also go back to an early hour in the morning of that day of which we have just been speaking, in order that those who peruse these pages may be made acquainted with some events which weave themselves into the web of the history as we proceed with our task.

It was at an early hour then—perhaps a little before six o'clock; and, though there was a certain degree of grey mingling with the blackness overhead, yet the light of a wintry morning had not sufficiently dawned to enable anyone to see within the various rooms of the château. It was at this period

that, in a small chamber, plainly furnished, and somewhat high up in one of the many towers of which the building consisted, there sat a very lovely girl, reading by the light of a small lamp a number of old letters which seemed to cause deep and painful emotions in her heart; for the tears streamed rapidly down her cheeks and almost drowned her sight, as she continued that which seemed a sad and sorrowful task.

The eyes from which those drops poured so rapidly, were large and black as jet, but soft and yet lustrous, even when swimming in the dew of grief. Her hair, too, and her fine eyebrows were of the same inky hue, but her skin was beautifully fair and clear, with a faint tinge of the rose in the soft cheek. In years she might be somewhere between eighteen and twenty, delicate in form, yet with limbs so well proportioned and lines so exquisitely drawn by the pencil of the Great Artist, that every movement displayed some new grace, whether when leaning her head on her hand, she bent down over the page, or raised her look suddenly to heaven, as if appealing on high for comfort or for justice.

Her back as she sat was turned towards the door; and her whole soul was evidently busy with the task before her—too busy as it proved; for she heard no step upon the stairs; she heard no hand upon the lock; she heard no movement in the room. She fancied that all in the house, but her own sad self, were sleeping quietly till the break of day. But it was not so; for as she bent over the pages, the door behind her opened quietly, and an elderly woman, dressed in the extreme fashion of the day, though in a travelling costume, looked in and then paused suddenly on seeing the light and the figure I have described. Her features were acquiline and strongly marked, her eyes keen and sunk, her figure tall and upright, but upon the faded cheek, even at that early hour, might be seen a glow of red, which, it needed no very practised eye to discover, was laid on by another hand than that of nature; and her eyebrows also betrayed a debt to art.

She paused, as I have said, for a moment at the door, then advanced with noiseless step, the perfect silence of which was produced by the slippers of fur which she wore to defend her feet in travelling from the cold; and approaching the fair reader from behind, she stretched forth her long, and somewhat meagre neck, and peered over her shoulder at the papers on the table.

The next instant she laid her large thin hand upon them with a firm and heavy pressure; and the poor girl, starting up with a short scream, stood before her, with face and lips as white as those of death, eyes

gazing with astonishment and fear, and limbs as motionless as if she had been turned into stone.

"What is this, Helen de la Tremblade?" said the Marchioness de Chazeul, in a sharp and ringing tone; "What is this, girl? Answer me this moment."

"Oh, madam, pardon me! pardon me!" cried the poor girl, falling at her feet.

"Pardon you?" said the lady, with a bitter look; "I will first see what I have to pardon;" and she began to gather up the letters.

"Oh no! no! no!" exclaimed the other, starting on her feet again, and endeavouring to snatch them away. "You must not—no, you must not! Do with me what you will; but do not read those. They are mine, madam—they are mine alone!"

But the marchioness thrust her rudely back, till she reeled to the other side of the room, at the same time crying, "How now, jade! Yours? I will read every word. Sit down upon that stool, and move a step if you dare. But I will secure you!" and, first gathering up the letters, she turned to the door, locked it, and walking back to the table, laid the key upon it, while she drew a seat facing the poor culprit, and repeated, "Sit down, this instant!"

The unhappy girl obeyed, and covered her face, now crimson, with her trembling hands; and Madame de Chazeul, drawing the lamp nearer to her, began to read the letter which lay at the top, commenting, as she proceeded, in a low hoarse voice, like the croak of a raven towards the approach of day. "Ha!" she said, as she went on, "Chazeul's hand! Good! I might have divined this. 'Eternal love and passion!'—fool! There's nothing eternal but folly."

Farther on, however, she seemed to find matter which occupied her more deeply; for her muttered words ceased, her brow put on a still heavier frown, and her small black eyes flashed with double fierceness. "How? how?" she cried, after nearly finishing the letter; "and is it so? What need I more? This is enough in conscience—oh, base girl! But I will see more—I will see more!" and she turned to another page.

When she had read some way farther, she laid the letter down again upon the table, and gazed at it sternly for several moments, with thoughts evidently busy afar; and then turning to the poor girl, who sat with her face still covered with her hands, she said, "Come hither!"

The girl obeyed with slow, trembling, and uncertain steps, not daring to raise her eyes. When she was near, however, she once more sank upon her knees before the harsh and heartless woman in whose power she was, and lifted her hands as if in the act of sup-

plication; but for several moments her lips refused their office, and no sound of voice was heard. At length when she did speak it was only to say, "Forgive me, oh, forgive me!"

"Perhaps I will," replied the marchioness, in a somewhat softer tone, though at the same time there was a lurking sneer at the corner of her mouth that showed no very merciful sensation, "perhaps I will, if you instantly make a full confession. Tell me how all this happened, without disguise, and perhaps your shame may be yet concealed. Speak, girl, speak."

"Oh, what can I say?" cried the unhappy girl, "you know all now; you see the words he used, the promises he made; you know that I was left entirely to his guidance. Often, when you were away, he has been here for weeks together; when you were here, he was always suffered to be with me. Long I resisted—for two years; ever since my uncle placed me with you has he tempted and urged and vowed, and I refused. But I was like a besieged city without assistance or support, and was driven to yield at length, when perhaps deliverance was at hand."

"Without assistance and support, base girl!" cried Madame de Chazeul, "why did you not tell me? and you should have soon had aid."

"Oh, lady!" replied Helen de la Tremblade, "I did tell you at first, when his words were not so clear, and you scoffed and jeered at me till I dared not say more; and, after that, I learned to love him. Then, for his sake, I dared not speak."

"So it was my fault, was it?" said the marchioness with a look of haughty contempt. "Thus is it ever; when a fool commits a folly, it is ever because somebody else did not counsel or help him. Was I the guardian of your virtue, girl?"

"You should have been," replied Helen de la Tremblade, a momentary spark of indignation rising in her breast as the worm was trampled on, "you should have been against your own son."

"Ha!" cried the marchioness, with a flashing eye; but then, restraining herself, she demanded, "Who brought these letters? Who was the pander to your guilt?"

"Nay, do not ask me that," said her unhappy companion; "be angry with me if you will; ask what you please about myself; but do not, do not vent your wrath on others."

"Will you say?" cried the marchioness, in a furious tone. "This moment, will you say?"

"No, no!" answered Helen in a deprecatory tone, "I cannot, I will not. He knew not what he brought."

"You will not!" repeated the marchioness sternly, "you will not! Girl, you shall! Are you not in my power?"

"You have no power to make me injure another," replied Helen mournfully; "I have injured myself enough; your son has corrupted, destroyed, betrayed me. With all these vows and promises written with his own hand, he is now about to wed another, whom he has no right to wed. Surely this is enough of misery; and I will not make my heart so sad as it would be were I to add the ruin of another to my own."

"Vows! promises! no right to wed her, base girl! I will soon show you what are such promises!" and, snatching up the whole packet of letters, she held them open to the flame of the lamp.

Contrary, perhaps, to the expectation of Madame de Chazeul, Helen de la Tremblade made not the slightest effort to stop her in the act. Whether it was that she felt her strength was not equal to contend with the tall and masculine woman, who was thus taking from her the only proof of those promises by which she had been betrayed, or whether it was the apathy of utter despair that restrained her, I cannot tell; but there she stood, motionless though not unmoved, with her eyes now tearless though full of sorrow, with her lip quivering but without a sound. Oh, who can tell the dark and terrible feelings of the poor girl's heart at that moment when, to all the bitterness of sin, and shame, and sorrow, and betrayed love, and disappointed hope and blighted affection, she saw destroyed before her face every evidence of the arts that had been used to deceive her, all that could palliate, if not justify, her conduct?

The flame caught the letters in an instant; and with a resolute hand the marchioness held the papers till the fire nearly scorched her, then cast the fragments on the tiled floor, and, as they were consumed, turned with a bitter and a mocking laugh to the poor culprit, exclaiming, "Now talk of vows and promises!"

"They are written in heaven, if not on earth," replied Helen de la Tremblade, gazing at her with a degree of firmness that but enraged her the more.

"Heaven!" she exclaimed in a contemptuous tone, "heaven! do you dare to talk of heaven? Fool, if that is your resource, I will make you rue your conduct, at least on earth!" Then advancing to the door, she unlocked it, returned, and, grasping the poor girl by the arm, dragged her after her, down the stairs and through the long corridors of the château, to the outer hall.

Now came the bitterest moment of the whole for the unhappy victim. The hall was filled with attendants prepared for a journey.

There were servants and armed men, the two maids of Madame de Chazeul, and a gay page jesting with one of them. All eyes were fixed upon her as, dragged on by the marchioness, she was brought into the midst of them; and oh, how thankful she would have been if the earth would but have been opened and swallowed her alive!

"Undo the door!" cried Madame de Chazeul. "There, throw it wide! Now strumpet, get thee forth, and carry your shame to any place where it may be marketable!"

"Oh God!" cried Helen de la Tremblade, clasping her hands in agony, "can it be possible? Have you—have you no pity? At least let me take that which belongs to me."

"Forth, wretch, forth!" cried the marchioness, stamping her foot. "Drive her out, drive her out, I say!"

No one stirred to obey the cruel order; but Helen turned and waved her hand, roused into some firmness by the cruel treatment she met with. "That shall not be needed, madam," she said. "I go; and when you stand at the awful judgment-seat of God, with all your sins upon your head; when all that you have done through life comes up before you as a picture, may you find a more merciful judge than you have proved to me."

"Away with you, away with you!" cried the marchioness, adding the coarsest term of reprobation that in the French language can be applied to woman. "It is ever thus with such wretches as you: when detected in sin, they begin to cant. Away with you, I say; let us hear no more of it!"

Helen turned, and walked slowly towards the door; but the page ran after her, exclaiming, "Here is your veil, mademoiselle; you left it below last night."

Helen took it; but before she could thank him, the marchioness strode forward, and dealt him a box on the ear that cast him upon the ground, exclaiming, "Who taught thee to meddle, malapert?"

"Ah, poor boy!" cried Helen; and with the tears in her eyes, she quitted the inhospitable doors, within which virtue and happiness had been sacrificed for ever.

For some way, she walked along utterly unconscious where she went. We must not say, she thought either of her situation at the time, of the past, or of the future; for there was nothing like thought in her mind. It was all despair? She asked not herself where she should go, what should be her conduct, what place of refuge she should find, how she should obtain even necessary food. The predominant sensation, if any were predominant, was a wish to die; and any road which led her from that hateful mansion was to her the same.

This troubled state continued for some minutes, till a small wood concealed her from the castle; but still she walked on, or rather ran; for her steps, under the impetuous course of her own feelings, grew quicker each moment as she went. At length she heard the sound of horses' feet and the grating roll of carriage wheels, and a vague remembrance of having seen the heavy coach of Madame de Chazeul standing prepared before the gates, made her believe that she was pursued by that terrible woman, and, a sudden feeling of terror taking possession of her, she darted in amongst the trees, and crouched behind some brush-wood.

There she could hear the whole train pass by; and as they wound on down the hill, she saw the well-known colours and figures sweep slowly on till, as they were beginning to rise on the opposite slope, they came to a sudden halt, and a consultation seemed to take place. In a few minutes two horsemen detached themselves from the rest, and passed the wood in a gallop towards the château; but poor Helen remained in her place of concealment; and, as she did so, the tumultuous agitation of her heart and brain grew somewhat calmer, and a long and bitter flood of tears brought thought along with it. But, oh how terrible was the reflection! how did she bemoan her own fatal folly! how desolate seemed her heart! how hopeless—how utterly hopeless—seemed her situation!

Where could she hide her head? she asked herself—where cover her shame?—where conceal herself from the eyes of all men?—who would help?—who would assist her?—who would speak one word of comfort, of consolation, of sympathy? None, none. From the sympathy of the virtuous and the good she had cut herself off for ever! Was she to associate with the abandoned and profligate?—was evil to become her good?—was moral death to bring her mere mortal life? Ah, no! she would sooner die, she thought, a thousand-fold sooner die; and she abhorred herself for her weakness past, more than many who think themselves virtuous, would abhor themselves for actual crime.

"Why should I stay here?" she asked herself at length. "I am an outcast—a beggar; my father and mother in the grave; my uncle's face I dare not see; I have no one to seek—I have no road to choose; the wide world is before me; I must trust myself to fate;" and rising up, with the feeling of desolate despair taking possession of her once more, she followed the path before her, then turned into another, then wandered along a third, and thus went on for nearly an hour-and-a-half, with several of the country

people who passed her, turning round to gaze in surprise at so fair and delicate a creature straying abroad, with a vacant air and tear-stained countenance, at so early an hour of the morning.

At length she felt weary ; and with listless indifference to all that might befall her, she seated herself on a stone, at the foot of a wooden cross, which had been erected by some pious hand beneath a high tree-covered bank, down which the snow, now melting under the first warmth of spring, was slipping from time to time in large masses, or sending forth a thousand small streams, which rendered the road almost like the bed of a river.

Poor Helen heeded it not, however ; she took no notice of the cold and the wet. The bodily discomforts that she suffered had but little effect upon her ; and, if she perceived them at all, they came but as things which recalled to her mind more forcibly the hopeless desolation of her situation. Thus, after a few minutes' rest and thought, she once more bent down her beautiful head upon her two fair hands, and wept long and bitterly.

While she was thus sadly occupied, the sound of a horse's feet striking the plashy ground at a quick pace came down the lane. She gave it no attention, and the horseman dashed passed her, apparently without noticing her. It was not so, however ; and about a hundred yards farther on he pulled in his rein, and turned back again. In another minute he was by her side ; and she heard a kind and good-humoured voice exclaim, "What is the matter, young lady, has any one injured you ?"

Helen de la Tremblade looked up, and beheld in the person who addressed her a man of a frank and open countenance. He was dressed in a brown suit of a plain rough cloth, and seemed to be a substantial countryman of about forty years of age, though his beard and moustache was somewhat grey. There was a look of pleasant and intelligent interest on his face, which might have brought back some hope to her cold heart, for it spoke of sympathy ; but she replied in a sad and bitter tone, "Alas, I have injured myself," bursting into a fresh gush of tears as the words of self-reproach passed her lips.

The man gazed at her for a moment in silence, seemingly puzzled by the contrast between her dress and her apparent situation. At length he exclaimed, "Parbleu ! you cannot stay here, my poor girl. You seem a young thing, and well nurtured ; what can have brought you into this state ?"

"My own fault, as well as the cruelty of others," answered Helen de la Tremblade.

"Well, we all have faults," replied the man, "God forgive us for them ! and as for the cruelty of others, we are none of us good enough to afford to be severe, especially when errors are freely acknowledged. But tell me, can I do anything to help you ? I have little time ; but I cannot find in my heart to see a fair young thing like you left to perish by the roadside."

"Oh !" cried Helen starting up ; "if you would but give me shelter for a single night, till I can think, till I can give my mind some order, you might save me from destruction. Doubtless," she added, seeing him pause as if in hesitation, "doubtless you have a home not far off ; doubtless you have wife and children—daughters perhaps ; and should you hear my prayer, be sure God will bless and protect them, if ever they fall into misery like me. I am not intentionally wicked, indeed ; weak I may be : nay, weak I am, but not vicious ; no, not vicious, whatever you may think."

"Pardie, few of the fine dames of France can say that !" exclaimed the horseman. "But the truth is, my poor young lady, my home is not very near. But I would fain help you if I could. Where are your father and mother ? Better go home to them, and if you have offended them, try to soften them with tears. They must have hard hearts if they resist."

"They are in the grave," answered the unhappy girl.

"And what is your name, poor thing ?" inquired her companion.

She paused and hesitated ; but the next moment she said, "Why should I conceal the truth ? my name is Helen de la Tremblade."

"What !" exclaimed the farmer, "the niece of the good priest at the Château de Marzay ?"

"The same," answered Helen with a mournful shake of the head.

"Then you have been residing with the old Marchioness de Chazeul," rejoined the other, adding, "at least the servants told me so."

"Till this morning," replied Helen with a sigh, "but I am now a houseless outcast."

The horseman dismounted from his beast, and took her kindly by the hand ; "Alas, poor child," he said, "you have been, I fear, under a hard ruler. I know something of this woman ; if not personally, at least by hearsay ; and I can easily believe that she has been harsh and unkind."

"But I was first in fault," answered Helen, interrupting him frankly, "I deserved reproach, perhaps punishment, but oh, not so terrible as this."

"Why, what was the cause ?" asked the

farmer. "Nay, then," he proceeded, "as your cheek glows, I will ask no further questions. I seek not to distress you, young lady, but to serve you; and if I can, I will place you in security. You cannot—you must not remain here. Heaven only knows what might happen to you. But how I am to get you hence I cannot tell. I have not time to go back with you to Marzay, and—"

"Not for existence," cried Helen de la Tremblade, "no, not for all that earth can give, would I set my foot within those walls."

"Ay, I forgot," rejoined the farmer, "she must be there by this time."

"Oh, not for that—not for that alone," exclaimed the poor girl with a shudder, "you do not know—you cannot tell all."

"Well," replied her companion, "perhaps you may think differently by and by. But in the mean time, how am I to get you hence? I am going to the village of St. André, some eight leagues distance, and have no conveyance but the horse I ride. Stay," he continued, "I will go on a short way, and see if I can find a cottage or farm-house where we can hire horse or cart."

"Oh do not leave me," cried Helen, "you are the first who has spoken kindly to me; and perhaps—perhaps if you go you may not return."

"I will, upon my honour," replied the farmer; and setting spurs to his horse, he was away over the opposite hill in a few moments.

The time went heavily by with Helen de la Tremblade. She asked herself, "Will not he too deceive me?" and when nearly twenty minutes passed without her companion's return, her heart sank, and her eyes once more filled with tears. It had seemed, while he was near her, that she was not totally abandoned, that she had still some human being to hold communion with, that she was not, as she had at first believed, shut out from all sympathies. She knew not who he was, it is true; she had no information of his name, his station, or his character; but he had spoken kindly to her, he had shown feeling, humanity, compassion; and perhaps it was that which had made her fancy she had seen in his countenance all the higher and nobler qualities of the mind and the heart. She longed for his return then; and in counting the weary minutes and listening for every sound, she in some degree forgot the oppressive weight of the past and future. At length, tired with expectation, she rose and walked along the road to see if he were coming; and, as so often happens, no sooner had she given way to her impatience, than she saw his figure rising over the hill.

"I have got a man and horse with a pillion," he said, riding up to her, "I cannot promise you, Mademoiselle de la Tremblade, any long or sure protection, but I will engage to put you in a place of safety for a night or two. During that time you will have the opportunity of thinking over your future conduct. I am not a rich man, but, on the contrary, a very poor one; yet you shall share what little I have in my purse, as I must leave you to your own guidance towards nightfall; and if you like to confide in me fully, when we stop three hours hence, you will find that you have not misplaced your trust. Think of it as we go; for I cannot speak with you of such things, while your good squire is with you. Mayhap you might find worse people in whom to place your confidence than Michael Chasseron."

Helen did not reply; for while he was yet speaking, an old peasant with the horse which had been promised came in sight; but she mounted gladly, and rode on beside the companion, whom she had known barely an hour, with a heart relieved, though not at rest. As they went on, too, he spoke to her of many things, in plain and homely terms, but with wide and various information, and with a winning kindness and consideration for her sorrows, which made her feel, that all the world were not harsh and bitter as those she had just left. She herself said little, but she found herself constrained in gratitude to answer such questions as he thought fit to ask; and, although he inquired nothing directly regarding her situation, and she believed she told him nothing, yet, in fact, long before they reached their halting-place he had learned nearly all that he desired to know, not by her words, but by his own conclusions.

CHAPTER XI.

MADAME DE CHAZEUL AND THE PRIEST.

THE moment Helen de la Tremblade had quitted the château, Madame de Chazeul entered the carriage which stood prepared for her in the court, and accompanied by what she considered a sufficient guard, set out upon her way towards the dwelling of her brother. Her thoughts, however, were not of the pleasantest kind. At first, they were all in confusion; but, through the turbid mass of her angry sensations, there came an impression, a consciousness, that she had too much given way to the violence of a disposition, originally irritable and passionate,

which all her cunning and art had not been able to bring effectually under control. This preception grew stronger and more distinct as she became cooler; but, for a time, she attempted to justify to herself what she had done, on the score of policy. If Rose d'Albret were to hear of this," she said, "we should have new difficulties, and all my well-laid schemes would be frustrated; so that it was necessary to get the girl out of the château as quickly as possible. She will never venture to go to her uncle's, surely! Oh no, she was ever timid and frightened; she will hide away in some corner till she finds a new lover."

This reasoning did not satisfy her, however. She saw there was danger in the course she had pursued. She asked herself, what was she to say to Walter de la Tremblade when he inquired after his niece, whom she had taken some two years before, as what was then called, *Demoiselle de campagne*? Was she to tell him what had occurred. Was she to relate her own conduct? Was she even to acknowledge that her son had seduced the unhappy girl under her own roof, with opportunities afforded by her own negligence, and not the best example, by her own conduct? If such things came to his ears what course would he pursue? Might he not blast all her projects; destroy, even by a word, all the glorious fabric which she had been building up for her son's ambition? He was not one who could be cajoled and cheated; he was not one who could be over-ruled or thwarted. Art to art, and cunning to cunning, he was her match; and she felt it. No, the matter must be concealed from him entirely, at least till her schemes were all successful, and Rose d'Albret was the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul. Then, she thought, he might do his worst; the prize would be gained, the struggle accomplished, and his power at an end.

Next came the question how this concealment was to be secured. If Helen did not go to him at once—which the marchioness little believed she would—might she not write the tale which she would be afraid to speak. That was not at all improbable. Nay, destitute as she had been driven forth, it seemed certain that want would compel her to do so immediately; and then the whole must be discovered.

As these thoughts presented themselves to her mind, she formed her plan with her usual decision; and, bidding one of her women order the coachman to stop, she called to the door of the vehicle, two of the mounted men who accompanied the carriage, and in whom she thought she could rely, and directed them to return immediately to the château.

"Seek for the girl Helen," she said, "you

will soon find her; 'tis not a quarter of an hour since she went. You can take some people on foot with you, to hunt about in the neighbourhood. Carry her back home immediately; and tell Mathurine to lock her up in her own room and keep her upon bread and water till I return. I have been somewhat too severe with her, though she must undergo some punishment. Away, as hard as you can gallop, and mind you find her, or you shall repent it. Here, Theodore, speak with all the people, and tell them, on their lives, not to utter one word at the Château de Marzay of what has taken place this morning. I and Mademoiselle de la Tremblade will soon make it up again."

The man to whom she last spoke promised to obey, though, understanding his mistress well, he clearly saw that she had some other end in view than merely reconciling herself to her own conscience for her over severity, and the carriage rolled on once more upon its way.

About four hours after, it reached the Château de Marzay, having met with no farther impediments by the way than such as were presented by roads naturally rough and uneven, which had become one mass of mud and dirt from the united effects of a sudden thaw and long neglect. In the courtyard of the mansion she was received by her brother, the Count de Liancourt, who informed her, according to his version, of all that had taken place in the château since the arrival of De Montigni. He told her the truth, in fact, as he believed it; but nevertheless, he gave her a completely false view of the whole affair; for it is ever to be remarked and remembered that, of all the treacherous liars against whom we have to guard in our course through life, our own heart, with its whole host of subtleties and fallacies, its prejudices, its vanities, and its self-delusions is the most dangerous. Men would rarely, if ever, be deceived if they did not aid most strenuously to deceive themselves, and what is more curious still, it often happens that when we are most busy in attempting to put a fraud upon others, we are most actively cheating ourselves. There is always a traitor in the council whenever we quit the straightforward course of truth and rectitude.

Monsieur de Liancourt assured his sister, as she alighted from her carriage, and walked up the staircase to the hall above, that the only difficulty was with De Montigni, and that Rose d'Albret had used her influence upon him to induce him to consent.

"Has she?" said the marchioness, thoughtfully; "not very vigorously, I should fancy."

"Oh yes, indeed," replied Monsieur de

Liancourt; "for I watched their parting from the cavalier, which was built at the time of the siege, where I could see them, but they could not see me. It was as formal as a court ceremony. He kissed her hand, and made her a low bow, and said something which I did not exactly hear, but the last words were, 'I will consider all you have said.'"

"So, then," said Madame de Chazeul, "Mademoiselle Rose hears reason at last! But what is it that has done this? She always seemed as cold as ice before, and barely willing."

"Oh! the fact is," replied the count, "Rose was never without ambition. I do not pretend to say she is in love with Chazeul; but he took care to inform her of the high and splendid fate that would be hers as his wife, and that was quite enough."

"It may be so," answered the marchioness, "ambition is at the bottom of every woman's heart; but yet if De Montigni were as handsome as when he went away, I should have fancied that love and folly might have had a hard struggle against ambition and good sense. I would not have suffered them to have any private conversation, if I had been here."

"It was the only way to get De Montigni to consent," rejoined Monsieur de Liancourt, "besides, Chazeul has no cause to fear the comparison. He is a man with knowledge of the world and of courts. The other is still a boy, with no knowledge of anything but books and philosophy."

"Not the man to win a woman, indeed;" said Madame de Chazeul, with a curl of the lip; "but we shall see."

As the last words were on her tongue, they entered the corridor where De Montigni and Chazeul were walking up and down with the old commander; and an amusing scene took place between the marchioness and the rest of the party. She had made up her mind as to the part which she was to act towards her nephew; and the moment she saw him, she exclaimed, with a joyous air, and holding out her open arms towards him, "Ah, my dear Louis, welcome back to your native land! What a truant you have been! How like he is to poor Louise!" and she embraced him, apparently with all the tenderness of a mother.

The old commander growled a savage oath or two, and, when she turned to him, looked her full in the face, saying, "He is like Louise; and that is why I love him."

"Ah, Michael," said the marchioness, "you always were a bear, and always will be one. It is lucky you do not bite as well as growl."

"I may bite some day, if I am provoked," answered the commander.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Madame de Chazeul, laughing as heartily as if her mind were free from all the weight of cunning schemes and violent passions. "You see, Louis, he is just the same as ever. We have not been able to tame him since you were gone. It is a sad, ferocious beast—a bear. And so you have come to grace the wedding?"

"I hope so, madame," replied De Montigni gravely; but his thoughts were busy with the question, of what should be his demeanour towards the artful woman who was now before him; and, while she said a few words to Chazeul, expressive of no particular affection towards him, the young baron made up his mind, to seem won by her manner, and to attach himself as much as possible to her during the day, in order to keep her from attacking Rose d'Albret, who, he feared, might not be so well able to play her part against the marchioness as himself.

Madame de Chazeul, however, was pertinacious too, and one of her first inquiries was for Mademoiselle d'Albret.

"I will send and call her," answered Monsieur de Liancourt; "let us go into the hall; perhaps she may be there."

They did not find her, however; and the servant he sent to summon her, soon returned with the tidings, that the young lady had gone to bed again with a bad headache.

"I will go and see her," said Madame de Chazeul. "Poor dear Rose, all the agitation of these preparations is too much for her; and she moved towards the door leading to Mademoiselle d'Albret's apartments, though the old commander exclaimed, in a surly tone, "You had better let her alone! Your tongue, Jacqueline, never cured a headache, I am sure."

The marchioness, however, was stopped by the entrance of another person with whom she had also to play her part; for just as she was quitting the hall father Walter appeared, and advanced towards her. Her face immediately assumed an air of friendly regard, and giving him her hand, she said, "Good morning, father, how fares it with you? Our dear Helen would have come with me, but she was somewhat indisposed. Nothing of consequence, however; and perhaps she will join us to-morrow, or, at all events, on the day of the marriage." Then suddenly breaking off, in order to avoid any further inquiries on that subject, she lowered her voice, and inquired, "How go things here, father? De Montigni is restive, I find. Are you sure of Rose?—quite sure, father? My brother, Anthony, continually blinds his own eyes; but you see more clearly."

"I think there can be no doubt," replied the priest, "not that I pretend to say that the lady loves your son; she regards the

alliance but as a family arrangement conducive to her interests, and the only means of giving peace and quietness to the house. For these reasons she has urged De Montigni to sign the renunciation and the contract, and I think he will do it—nay, I feel certain he will. They would hurry on the affair before your arrival, though I thought it would have been better to wait. But from the course things have taken, no harm has been done; and, perhaps, it may be as well now, when you see the lady, not to derange the impression which has been produced."

The marchioness mused. "How comes it, good father," she asked, "that Chazeul has not made himself loved? I fear he has been playing the fool with other women; for he is not reputed to want success upon a lady's heart, when he is inclined to try. I must give him some lessons; do you think that any of his love affairs have come to this girl's ears? That should be prevented till the marriage takes place."

"By all means," said the priest, "but I know of none from which there is any danger."

"And I of but one," rejoined the marchioness, "but I will take care to keep that from her. One may be justified in using a little violence for such an object."

"Assuredly," answered father Walter, "anything in short, but the spilling of blood."

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" cried the marchioness, "I bear the woman no ill-will for loving Chazeul; but if I were to have her carried off and shut closely up for a few days, there could be no harm in that."

"It were the best means," replied father Walter, "unless her family be sufficiently powerful to make dangerous resistance."

"There is no fear of that," answered Madame de Chazeul, with a quiet smile; "but I will go and see Mademoiselle d'Albret."

Thus saying she quitted the hall, while father Walter advanced towards the group of gentlemen at the other end, who had been conversing together calmly enough during his interview with the marchioness. That lady, however, returned after a very brief absence, saying that Rose d'Albret was trying to sleep; and, put upon a wrong track as she was, both by her brother and the priest, she attached herself during the rest of the morning to De Montigni, endeavouring by every artful means, to possess herself of his whole views and intentions, and at the same time to convince him, that he was giving pain to Rose d'Albret by his hesitation in regard to the signature of the papers.

One of the reasons why the game of life is not unfrequently won by the simple and the honest against all the arts of the politic and

the wily, is perhaps that, in this game, as in no other, the most skilful and calculating can never tell what cards may be in the hands of the adverse party. I say one of the reasons; for there are many, and amongst them is the belief, from which cunning people can never free themselves, that others are dealing with them in the same way that they would deal, if their relative situations were reversed.

Madame de Chazeul, however, had studied De Montigni's character from youth, and knew that he was generous and kind-hearted. She, therefore, like father Walter, endeavoured to work upon him, in the first instance, through his affection for Rose d'Albret. She spoke of her gently and tenderly, called her "poor Rose," and represented the slight indisposition under which she was suffering as entirely proceeding from some agitation and vexation she had undergone in the morning, affecting at the same time to be ignorant of the nature of that agitation, but leaving him to draw his own conclusions.

De Montigni, as the reader knows, had the secret in his own keeping, and internally mocked at all the policy which the marchioness displayed; for there is nothing so contemptible as discovered cunning. He resolved, however, to turn back Madame de Chazeul's art upon herself, and found even a pleasure in foiling her with her own weapons.

"Well, my dear madame," he answered, "I trust that, by this time to-morrow, Rose will have no farther cause for anxiety on my account."

"Indeed, how so?" asked the marchioness.

"Because by that time," replied De Montigni, "all will have been positively settled."

"And of course as Rose could wish," added the marchioness.

"As far as I understand her wishes, it shall be so," said De Montigni; "but I do not desire, madam, what I say to you to be repeated; and now will you tell me frankly, for I know you are well aware, what is the value of these benefices which my uncle offers me?"

"At least equal to the value of the estates," replied Madame de Chazeul: "more, indeed, if you take in the Abbey of Chizay in Poitou; but that I believe was promised to good Monsieur de la Tremblade—not exactly promised, perhaps; but I know he was led to expect it."

"No one shall break a promise for me," replied De Montigni with some emphasis on the words. "They can be all held, I believe, without taking the vows."

"Your uncle holds them," answered Madame de Chazeul, "and he has taken no

vows that I know of—unless it be, never to drink thin piquette when he can get strong Burgundy, or to eat pork when he can find venison.”

De Montigni smiled, and was going on to stop the questions of the marchioness by inquiries of his own, when the summons to dinner was heard, and the whole party descended to the hall below.

When the meal was over, father Walter put the young baron in mind, that they had to read over together the papers, in regard to which there had been so much discussion.

Although De Montigni much wished to occupy Madame de Chazeul as far as possible during the day, he could not well put off the engagement; and whispering to the old commander, to watch her closely, he retired with the priest to his own chamber. There, several long documents were spread out before him; and he proceeded, with pen and ink at hand, to peruse the whole, clause by clause, demanding minute and lengthened explanations as he went on, and taking notes of every point of importance. Father Walter was somewhat surprised at the calm and steady good sense he displayed; and, though De Montigni expressed neither consent to nor dissent from any of the items, was more and more convinced every moment, that the young baron had made up his mind, to accept the benefices and renounce the estates.

In the meanwhile the Marchioness de Chazeul had drawn her son away from the rest of the party below, and walking with him on the rampart, was giving him those lessons of which she had spoken to the priest. Not a word did she say of Helen de la Tremblade; nor a word of reproach or reproof did she utter; but her conversation turned entirely upon his demeanour towards Rose d'Albret.

“Ah, Chazeul!” she said, after taking a turn backward and forward, in the tone of one jesting with a friend, “thou art a silly lad, I fear, and little knowest how to push thy fortune with woman-kind.”

“Nay, my good mother, it is not thought so,” replied Chazeul, drawing up his head and smoothing his ruff; “I am no seeker after the fame of such conquests, but I have some reason to believe they are not so difficult as they are supposed to be.”

“True,” answered his mother, “doubtless with the light Parisian dame, the gay lady who has known a thousand lovers, thou art a potent assailant; but she is like a city which has been besieged and taken a thousand times, till all the outworks and ramparts have been battered down, and the place is right willing to surrender at the first sight of artillery. With a maiden fortress, however,

such as this fair Rose d'Albret, thou art but a poor general, otherwise you would have gained the citadel long ago.”

“Meaning her heart; but how would you have had me conduct the siege, dear mother?” asked her son, pursuing the simile she had used.

“By assault, Nicholas!” replied the marchioness; “prayers, tears, vows, daring, anything. Here neither wall, nor bastion, nor redoubt, is to be gained but by vigorous attack. Women, who by experience have not gained a knowledge of their own weakness, are always more resolute in resistance than those who have learned that they cannot long hold out when closely pressed. Storm and escalade are the only ways with such castles, Chazeul; and if you were to pursue till doomsday your cold and formal rules of siege, you would make no way, but find defences grow up in proportion to the feebleness of the attack.”

“Why, you would not surely have me treat Rose d'Albret as any common woman of but light fame?” said Chazeul. “You are much mistaken, mother, if you think that is the way to win her.”

“Nay, I would have you treat her very differently, foolish boy,” replied the marchioness. “With a woman of light fame, as you call her, you may well trust to her to make at least half the advances. With a young ignorant girl you must make them all yourself; for, be sure, she will not. One or the other must be bold and daring; and the only question is, on whose part it shall be. The practised dame will take her share on herself, the inexperienced girl expects it all from you. We all know in our hearts, Chazeul, that we do not dislike an impetuous lover. Though we may chide, we easily forgive even very grave offences, so that love be the excuse. The story of the Romans and the Sabines was a good allegory of women's hearts; men must take them by force if they would have them.”

“Oh, her heart is mine sufficiently for all the purposes of wedded life,” replied her son. “I know her better than you, my good mother, and am well aware that more things enter into the calculations of that little brain than you imagine. I would not spoil her,” he continued, “with too much devotion. You women grow exacting as you imagine you have power; and I would have her think the tie she has upon me is not too strong, lest she should one day think fit to use it strongly. It is enough for me to know, that she sees clearly her own interest in a marriage with myself. She will not expect, in a wedding of convenience, all that court and exclusive attention which some brides demand; and every little loverlike act will come with tenfold force.”

"All very wise and very prudent, good youth," replied his mother, "if you had no rival, no competitor in the game that you are playing; if there were no obstacles, no difficulties in the way. But here our great object is time and secure possession: and had you, by bold and ardent eagerness, advanced your suit so that she had no escape from marriage with you, we should have found both herself and De Montigni more tractable, depend upon it."

"She is tractable enough," replied Chazeul, "it is De Montigni alone that holds out; and she has done her best to persuade him, I am sure. A rival, do you call him? but a pitiful rival to me; and as to obstacles and difficulties, whatever have existed are swept away already. She has done her best to persuade De Montigni to sign; and I am sure he will do so."

"Well," said the marchioness, "we shall see. I think he will, but do not feel so sure. He was somewhat too smooth and courteous just now; and I thought I saw a somewhat double meaning in his words, as if he hoped still that Rose might raise up some impediment. We must suffer him to have no farther speech with her alone. It is a dangerous plan."

"There is no fear of Rose," replied Nicholas de Chazeul peevishly. "If it be anything like love on his part for her that you dread, it is a vain fancy. Had you seen him meet her last night you would have been cured of such dreams. He was as cold as if we had imported a statue from Italy, fresh cut in the stone; and not all Rose could do would warm him."

"Ay, before others," rejoined the marchioness, "but perhaps when alone it might be different."

"No, no," said Chazeul, "my uncle watched them, and it was just the same: all formal bows and stiff courtesies. But who is this, comes riding here?" he continued, gazing from the battlements. "A trumpeter at full speed, with a green scarf! News from Mayenne, upon my life! I must go down and see."

Thus ended a conversation which has been repeated here with reluctance; but it is as needful, in painting nature, to show the mind and character of the bad as of the good, to display the thoughts and reasonings of the wicked as of the virtuous. Neither does the portrait of Madame de Chazeul serve little to exemplify the times in which she lived. France was then full of such. Intrigue of every kind, amorous and political, was then at its height, and most of the infamous and daring deeds that were done, either for the gratification of private passions, or for the attainment of great public objects, were suggested by women.

The man who had been seen riding so sharply towards the château, proved to be a trumpeter sent by the Duke of Nemours with letters to Chazeul, notifying the march of the army of the League to relieve the town of Dreux, closely besieged by the king, and calling upon him to join it, with all his retainers, as a battle seemed inevitable. The despatches spoke in glowing terms of the force under Mayenne. It was nearly double in number, they said, to that which Henry of Bourbon could bring to oppose it, and a glorious victory would soon be achieved, in which all honourable men would long to take part. Chazeul, however, sent an ambiguous answer; for he was not one to sacrifice his private interests even to the triumph of his faction, and he was resolved to possess the hand of Rose d'Albret, and to see the estates of Liancourt and Marennes secured to himself before he quitted the Château of Marzay.

More than one hour elapsed before Louis de Montigni had terminated his examination of the papers with the priest; and even then, with all father Walter's skill, he could not extract from him any promise, either direct or indirect, to sign them. To the eager questions of Madame de Chazeul the priest could but reply, "I cannot tell what he will do. I believe his mind is made up to act as we could wish; but his demeanour is certainly somewhat strange. He has taken notes of everything, and remains pondering over them. Our only plan is to watch the commander, and to cut them off from any private communication with each other. Noon to-morrow will show us what we are to expect; and in the meantime we must guide things as we can. Have you seen Made-moiselle d'Albret?"

The marchioness replied in the negative, and it was not till one hour before sunset that Rose came forth from her chamber to breathe, for a few minutes, the fresh air. She was pale, and evidently suffering; and whenever Madame de Chazeul attempted to question her, she pleaded indisposition as an excuse for talking little. She gazed forth from the ramparts over the wide country which the château commanded with a feeling of dread, mingling strangely with hope and joy. The bright sunshine of the first day of spring was glittering over the whole; but on the verge of the southern sky was hanging a dark and heavy mass of clouds, rising up in all sorts of fantastic forms; and Rose could not help associating her own fate with the aspect of the day, and thinking that the bright gleam of summer, which had come to her heart after a long and chilling winter, might, perhaps, be soon blackened by storms, the clouds of which were already within sight.

Soon after the party was joined by De Montigni; and the two lovers strove hard to conceal their feelings under the appearance of cold indifference; but Rose found the task so difficult that she remained only a few moments after the young baron's appearance, and then once more retired to bed.

Madame de Chazeul remarked the whole; and suspicion rose up in her mind. But the field of probability is wide and dim, so that her doubts found no fixed point to rest upon; and she contented herself with whispering to De Montigni, "Were I a man, I would not long give a lady cause to fly me thus."

The young nobleman made no answer, but turned away, as if somewhat offended; and this slight indication of temper was used by Madame de Chazeul to deceive herself. "Were he not acting contrary to the girl's wishes," she said to herself, "he would not take offence at my supposing it."

The rest of the day passed without any occurrence of importance; and the only points which Madame de Chazeul thought worthy of notice at supper were the absence of Estoc from the table, and that Louis de Montigni confined his conversation almost altogether to father Walter, with whom he talked a good deal in a low tone. She herself was tired with early rising and a journey. The commander soon retired to rest; and she followed without delay, as soon as she was certified by private information, from one whom she had set to watch, that the good old soldier was actually in his bed. Satisfied that all communication between Montigni and himself was at an end for the night, she laid herself down to seek that repose which is unfortunately, but not unnaturally, as often the portion of the hardened in vice as of the virtuous and the good.

CHAPTER XII.

BLANCHETTE IS DECEIVED.

I HAVE said something of the same kind before; but I must repeat that, unless it be in a mud cottage containing one room, and at the most two individuals, it scarcely ever happens that there are not several, very various scenes proceeding in the same house, at the same time; and when the house is large, and the inhabitants many, these scenes are multiplied and diversified even to infinity. Tragedy and comedy, broad farce

and startling romance, have each their separate chambers, and their several actors; and while, in the halls of the Château of Marzay, all the cunning drama of intrigue which we have described, found a stage, the acts of many another play were being performed in the chambers allotted to the servants.

Loud and uproarious merriment had its part; and, as is too frequently the case, the vices and follies of their superiors were imitated by the inferiors, presenting pictures too gross and unpleasant to be given in this place. We must, however, turn away from the principal personages of our tale, to notice some events which took place, during the hour of supper, in a part of the château somewhat distant from that in which Monsieur de Liancourt's family was assembled.

In a room not far from that of Made-moiselle d'Albret, with the door ajar, a lamp upon the table, and a piece of embroidery in her hands, sat Blanchette, the maid of our fair friend Rose. She paid but little attention to her work indeed, though she affected to be very busily employed, but her ear was turned frequently towards the passage, apparently listening for every sound. At length it was gratified by hearing a step; and the moment after, the valet of Monsieur de Chazeul pushed open the door, and entering the room, closed it behind him. He was a tall, swaggering, debauched-looking personage, and into the particulars of the first greetings between himself and Blanchette, I shall beg leave not to enter. Suffice it to say, that they betokened a degree of intimacy which Rose d'Albret had certainly not the slightest idea existed between her maid and any other person.

After a while, however, the valet inquired, "Well now, tell me, my pretty Blanchette, all that your mistress has been saying to you to-day."

"Indeed, I shall not," replied the maid, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't intend to tell you, or Monsieur de Chazeul, anything more."

"Come, come, don't be silly," cried the man, "for I must soon get back; now the caprices of you ladies," he continued, with an affected air, "are very pretty and interesting in affairs of love, but very troublesome in matters of business."

"Well, I shan't say anything more," said Blanchette, with a determined air, "so there is no use of talking about it."

"Ah, ha, then," rejoined the valet, "I see how it is; your mistress has told you not to tell."

"Indeed, she has not," answered Blanchette; "but she has taught me to value myself more highly than your master does."

"How so?" demanded her companion; "I am sure my master values you as highly as I should like to see him. What did she say to you about it?"

"Ah, I don't mind telling you that," said the maid. "She asked me last night, when I was saying something in favour of Monsieur de Chazeul, what he had given me; and, when I told her, she said she was worth more than that, and that I was a great fool if ever I opened my mouth about him again, unless I got three times as much."

"Upon my word the lady has some notion of life," cried the valet; "one would think she had spent her whole days in Paris; and she is right too, Blanchette, we servants should never put too low a value on ourselves, for we have more in our power than people imagine. However, I can promise you that when Monsieur de Chazeul is married to your lady, you shall have three times as much; and in the meantime—"

"Ay, ay," replied Blanchette; "a fish in the plate is worth three in the stream, Alphonso. Promises are made of wind, and it is very difficult to convert them into anything else."

"Well, but listen to me," said the man. "I was just going to say, in the meantime Monsieur le Marquis has sent you five-and-twenty crowns. Here they are," and he placed a little leathern bag in her hand; "now, there's a dear, beautiful girl, tell me all your mistress has said to you to-day, especially after her long talk with Monsieur de Montigni, this morning."

"That is soon told," answered Blanchette, putting the money in one of the pockets of her apron; "she said nothing at all, except that she had got a headache, and would go to bed again."

"Peste!" cried the valet; "is that all the news that you can give? Surely you have made out something more. What humour did she seem in?"

"Bad enough," replied Blanchette; "I think Monsieur de Montigni must have done or said something to offend her, for I could see she had been crying, and she was silent and dull, just as she is when she is angry with me."

"I dare say he did," rejoined the valet; "for he is an obstinate colt; and takes as long to drive where people want him, as an ass loaded with sand. But hark, there is some one walking in the passage."

They listened, and a heavy step sounded along the corridor, advancing in measured time from one end to the other, and then back again, like that of a sentry keeping guard. It passed and repassed twice, not a little to the annoyance of the two worthies shut up in the room together. But at length the valet, who did not wish his absence to

be remarked and commented upon amongst the servants, declared, "Whoever it is, I must go; but do you shut the door after me quickly, Blanchette, then no one need know that you are here."

"I am afraid mademoiselle will call every moment," answered the girl; "but people must have time to take their supper, you know."

"I must go, upon my life," said the man, who took a great deal more interest in his own position than in hers. "Now, Blanchette, I will pop out as soon as he is passed; you close the door quick behind me, and he will not see whence I come."

He accordingly waited till the steps sounded close to the door, and then as soon as they had gone by, opened it, and went out as noiselessly as possible. But this foot-fall did not escape the quick ears of the old soldier, Estoc, who turning instantly, not only perceived who it was, but also marked the room from which he came. He said nothing, however; but, as soon as the valet had left the passage, advanced at once to the door which had just been closed, and, opening it without ceremony, went in. As may be supposed, this sudden apparition troubled the maid a good deal; and, though an impudent and unprincipled girl, she was not yet sufficiently veteran in vice to keep her cheek from growing red, or her hands from shaking.

"Well, Mademoiselle Blanchette," said Estoc, "I thought I should find you here."

"Indeed, sir!" said Blanchette. "I generally sit here."

"Not always, Blanchette," replied Estoc; "but I saw your lover leave you, and so I came in, just to give you a word of advice." Blanchette coloured and bit her lip, but made no reply; and Estoc went on, "You are in the wrong line, if you wish to make your fortune, mademoiselle. Now, if you will follow my counsel, you may do something for yourself. Go up to Monsieur de Montigni's apartments about eleven o'clock to-night, for he wants to speak with you."

"Lord! Monsieur Estoc," cried the girl; "I would not go up to any gentleman's room at night for the world. I wonder how you could propose such a thing!"

"Oh! I make no difficulty in proposing it," answered Estoc, "when you make none in receiving a gentleman's valet at night. But Monsieur de Montigni only wants to speak with you on business, to ask you one or two questions, and perhaps, to make you a present of a couple of hundred crowns."

"I am very much obliged to him, sir," replied the girl, affecting a cold and modest air; "but I would rather speak to him in the day, if he has no objection."

"That can't well be, Blanchette," answered Estoc; "for Monsieur de Montigni intends to go away to-morrow; and he will not have time previous to his departure. Now, my good girl, remember you are in my power, for don't you suppose that, if this business comes to the ears of Mademoiselle d'Albret, you will stay in her service a minute after."

"Well, I have done nothing that's wrong," replied the girl boldly; "and I don't care what any spy says of me, not I."

"Well, we understand each other," rejoined Estoc. "Give me an answer in one word, will you come, or will you not? Your reply will decide your own fate."

"Well, sir, well," said Blanchette, who saw that the plan of outfacing the old soldier would not succeed; "I will come if you will be there too."

"Oh, that I certainly shall," replied Estoc; "for I have got some papers to look over with Monsieur de Montigni—so I may tell him you will come?"

"Yes, sir," replied Blanchette, "I will;" and, with a significant nod of the head, Estoc left the room.

Without going near the supper hall, he retired at once to the apartments of De Montigni, where he waited for about half an hour, till he was joined by the young nobleman, to whom he related all that had taken place. "The girl is not to be depended upon," he added in the end, "and I think it would be better when we have got her, to lock her up here for the night."

"Nay," answered De Montigni, "that were a violent proceeding. I have told my servant Joseph to watch her well, and we shall hear his report. If I find that she has been holding any communication with these people, since you saw her, we must devise some means to blind her eyes. But now, Estoc, is all the rest prepared?"

"Everything," replied the old soldier. "I have the guard to-night; and I have picked my men from those who will not fail us. Your servants have their orders; and, were it needful, we could make all the rest prisoners in the castle here; but that you would not like to do."

"Certainly not," replied De Montigni. "I think at present they have no suspicion; and I trust that we shall be able to execute our scheme without either difficulty or strife. Be with me when this girl comes, Estoc, and now go and take some refreshment; but above all things caution my good uncle Michael to make no effort to see me to-night, and to seek repose at his usual hour. Depend upon it there are watchful eyes upon us; and, of all things, we must avoid suspicion."

While he was speaking, a sunburnt man, who had accompanied him from Italy, made his appearance, and bowing low with a smile,

he said, "I have watched and listened to some purpose, Monsieur le Baron. As soon as supper was over, Mademoiselle Blanchette drew aside Alphonso, the marquis's valet, and whispered with him long in the corner of the hall; I saw they were very eager, but could hear nothing; and as I was resolved to know more, I crossed suddenly behind her back, just as the man was saying, 'I will wait for you at the bottom of the stairs.' I could hear no more, for they both stopped."

"That is enough, that is enough," replied De Montigni, "we must remedy this, Estoc; but I will have the whole plan ready when you come again."

At half-past ten Estoc was in the young nobleman's room; and at eleven, Blanchette might be seen creeping stealthily up the stairs with a lamp in her hand, while in the dark corridor below, concealed in one of the recesses of the windows, stood Chazeul's valet, waiting for her return. Almost all the rest of the household had retired to bed; and the château remained perfectly silent for a quarter of an hour, while the man continued his watch in darkness. At the end of that time, however, Blanchette and her lamp were once more seen upon the stairs; and, whispering to him as she passed, "Quick, quick, old Estoc is coming down directly, he is now speaking to the baron at the door," she hastened on, through that passage, across the lower hall, and up a short flight of steps towards the apartments of Chazeul. The valet followed quickly, and introduced her into the dressing-room of his lord, who was waiting with some impatience for the intelligence she was to bring.

"Well, well," he cried, as soon as she appeared, "what is it he wishes, Blanchette? Let us hear all that took place."

"When first I came in," said Blanchette, after a pause to take breath, and a little coquettish panting and holding her hand upon her heart, "Monsieur de Montigni spoke me very fair, and promised a great deal. He said he knew that I was in your interest, sir, and he did not wish me to betray my trust, but that he was very anxious indeed to have an hour's private conversation with mademoiselle before noon to-morrow. He asked me if she was yet asleep; and when I told him she was, and had been so for these two hours, he turned to Estoc and said, 'That is unfortunate;' he then looked again to me, and calling me close to him, he spoke almost in a whisper, saying, that if I would engage to get him the interview early to-morrow, before the rest of the people are stirring, he would give me two hundred crowns, and as an earnest, put these into my hand. He told me particularly to be very secret, and not to say a word to anyone, which, of course, I promised as much as he could wish."

"You did quite right, you did quite right," replied Chazeul: "but did he let you know what was his object in seeking this interview? He must have said something more, for you were long with him."

"Oh, I asked him, noble sir," replied the girl, "what I was to tell my mistress he wished to see her for; but he replied somewhat sharply, that it was no business of mine; and then I said I was sure Mademoiselle d'Albret would ask; but that if he did not like to say, it was not my fault if he did not get the meeting he wanted; and then he replied that if my mistress did inquire, I was to tell her he wanted to hear more explicitly from her own lips what he had not time fully to understand in the morning."

Chazeul laughed. "The poor youth writhes like an eel upon a spear," he said; "he would fain make one more effort; but we will not let him. Now mark me, Blanchette, not one word of this to your mistress. She has been too much agitated to-day; and we must not have the same scenes every morning. She made herself clearly enough understood for any man of common sense; and by that Monsieur de Montigni must abide. I will not forget you, Blanchette, if you are faithful and discreet; and it is no bad post, *première demoiselle* to the Marchioness of Chazeul. So now, go to bed and sleep, and contrive to forget Monsieur de Montigni's commission before to-morrow morning."

"That I will, monsieur," replied Blanchette; and with a curtesy she quitted the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT.

THE moments which the maid Blanchette passed with De Montigni, and afterwards with Chazeul, were full of anxiety to Rose d'Albret. She lay in darkness, wakeful and expectant, listening for every sound to give her some indication of the girl's return to the ante-chamber, from which she had heard her distinctly go forth, without knowing the cause. Imagination was busy with every painful possibility. She feared that their whole scheme of flight might be discovered; she thought that the maid might have conceived a suspicion from some little preparations which she had made during the evening; she asked herself what would be her fate if the execution of their design were prevented. Would they, could they, compel her to unite herself to Chazeul? and she now shrunk from the very idea with tenfold horror. She would not do it, she thought; she would

sooner die. She would seek the protection of the cloister—anything, she would do anything rather than give her hand to one whom she equally disliked and despised. Suddenly, in the midst of these feelings, a sensation of wonder at their vehemence came over her; and she asked herself how it was that her ideas upon the subject had been so suddenly and completely changed.

She had till lately looked upon her marriage with Chazeul as a thing arranged, and to which she would submit, not without some repugnance, perhaps, but without that degree of horror and dislike which she now experienced. At first she had been coldly indifferent; and afterwards she had wished to put off the day of the sacrifice as long as possible; but she now felt that a life of penury and daily labour would be comparative happiness to wedding Nicholas de Chazeul.

How had a single day made this strange difference? she inquired, and then she thought of De Montigni; and, though no eye could see her, the colour rose in her cheek, to feel how different were all her sensations towards him, how willingly to him she would yield heart and hand! But the secret of the change was discovered—she loved, and loved truly, and a new light shone into her heart.

Quickly, however, her thoughts wandered back again to the present; and once more she listened for Blanchette's return. Where could she have gone? she asked herself; what could be her motive, if something were not discovered? Her own heart was too pure to attribute to the girl that conduct, which perhaps, if she had known all, would have been first suspected; but as she raised herself on her arm, to give ear to some distant noise, she heard the outer door of the anteroom open again, and the step of the maid moving about in the neighbouring chamber. With a beating heart, and in breathless silence, Rose marked every sound, till at length a thin line of light, which crossed the door from the key-hole, was suddenly extinguished; and she heard the girl take her place in bed. A few minutes after, the clock of the château struck twelve, but Rose still lay quiet for some minutes, in order that the spy upon her actions might be asleep before she moved.

Blanchette, however, was one of the "dull weeds" that easily fasten themselves on "Lethe's shore." Herself was all she thought of, all she cared for; and, having provided to the best of her ability for the success and prosperity of that well-loved person, she was soon in the arms of slumber, undisturbed by any of the reproaches of conscience, or the lighter tones of imagination. The heavy breathing of profound and dreamless sleep was heard ere long; and

rising from her bed, Rose d'Albret dressed herself as well as she could in the darkness, and threw down the tapestry over the door between her room and that of the maid, to prevent Blanchette from hearing any sound within.

She feared that she should not be ready in time; and she hastened all her preparations eagerly, as much to withdraw her own thoughts from fears and apprehensions, as to guard against being too late; but, as so often happens, all was complete long before the hour; and for nearly twenty minutes, she sat at a little distance from the window, trembling with agitation and alarm.

She had now full time to give way to all the busy thoughts that naturally sprang from her situation. She felt she loved—she trusted she was beloved in return; but still to fly with De Montigni from all other protection—to put herself entirely in his power—to cast herself thus into his arms; it was rash, she thought; it was foolish. Would he continue to love her? Might not his quickly-roused passion die away as soon? Might he not be the first to think her rash confidence in him bold, almost immodest?

"No, no!" she answered, "he would not do so; he was too kind—too generous. He always had been. Why should she think him changed in mind and heart, in thought and feeling, since the bright days of his boyhood, when she had loved him so well? Did he not tell her that he had always loved her?—did he not promise to love her always?—and when had he ever broken his word? No, no! It was but agitation and weak terror made her doubt."

Even if there were a risk, she thought again, even if the dream of happiness with Louis de Montigni, which had come with so sweet a relief to her heart, were not to be fully realised, yet, when the only alternative was to wed a man she now hated and contemned, could she hesitate to give herself to one she loved? and again she answered, "No! If death were the only other course, she would seek it, rather than give her hand to Nicholas de Chazeul."

Her mind then turned to the dangers of the way; to the chance of being stopped ere they could quit the castle; to the likelihood of being discovered and frustrated; to the shame and confusion that must follow. She pictured herself brought before Monsieur de Liancourt; she called up the scornful looks of Chazeul and the sneering taunts of his mother; and for a moment her heart sank as fancy painted the scene with the vividness of reality. But then her spirit rose; "I would not bear it," she said to herself. "I would own my love to one, and my hatred to the other. I would call for a sight of the contract that my

father signed. I would refuse to wed this man—ay, even if they dragged me to the altar. I would demand the protection of the good old commander, and put myself under the guardianship of the law."

Poor girl, she little knew how powerless was the law in France at that moment. "It is strange," she continued, turning to another line of thought, "I have not heard the clock strike one; and yet it is long since twelve. Can anything have gone wrong? It must have struck without my hearing it. How dark it is without! Not a star in the sky, and the moon down! Those must be drops of rain I hear."

A moment after the heavy bell of the clock sounded upon her ear; and she found how long tedious expectation can make one short hour. Rose smiled at her own impatience, and said in her heart, "I must not let Louis know how eagerly I have watched for him; and yet, why not? If he be generous, as I think, to be so loved will but increase his own; and if he be not, no arts will keep a wayward heart. Hark there is a sound!" and the next instant, something like the steel point of a sword's scabbard, struck lightly against the window.

Rose opened it without noise and asked in a low and trembling voice, "Who is there?"

"'Tis I! 'tis I, my beloved," answered De Montigni, who was standing on a ladder, which had been placed against the window. "All is ready if you are. But, before you come, secure your maid in her own room. We have turned the key without. She is not to be trusted; and it were well to prevent her from giving the alarm to-morrow, till the last moment."

"There is but a bolt," said Rose d'Albret, "and I fear I shall wake her with the noise, for it is a very heavy one."

"Stay, dearest," replied her lover; "I will do it," and he sprang lightly into the room.

"Oh, Louis," whispered Rose, as he held her for a moment to his heart, "do not waste time."

"I will not," he answered. "Where is this bolt?" and following Rose, who led him on with a trembling hand, he drew back the tapestry and felt for the bolt upon the door. Slowly and gently he pushed it forward; but this was not accomplished without some noise, and the heart of Rose d'Albret beat as if it would have burst through her side. She could not even listen for the throbbing; but De Montigni bent down his ear; and after a moment he whispered, "It is all safe, she sleeps, my beloved. Now, Rose, now, and taking her hand in his, he led her back towards the window."

He felt by the trembling of her hand that she was greatly agitated; and although,

when he had first entered the room, he had given way, as we have seen, for a single instant, to the warm emotions of his heart, he would not now add by one rash caress to that which Rose already underwent. When they reached the window, however, he drew the other side of the casement farther back, to get out first and assist her in descending. But the lady detained him a moment by the hand, asking in a low voice, "And will you love me ever, Louis?"

"As from my earliest youth, so to my last hour, dear Rose," replied De Montigni in the same low tone.

"And will you never judge me rash, imprudent, bold, De Montigni?" again inquired the lady; "will you never reproach me, even in your own secret heart, for listening to your persuasions? will you never think it was immodest or unfeminine to quit the shelter of my guardian's house, and give myself to you with this implicit confidence?"

"Never, dear Rose!" replied De Montigni; "banish such idle apprehensions. I shall ever feel the deepest gratitude. I shall ever feel respect for that decision which saves me the pain, the peril, and the grief of bringing to account my nearest relations for a most shameful attempt to violate the contract with your father, and to defraud me of my own—for you are my own, Rose. You are pledged to me from your infancy, and indeed, dear one, I have a right to demand, as the only one entitled to your hand, that you should take the only means by which it can be secured to me; and for your thus yielding willingly and readily, my thanks, and love, and gratitude, are yours for ever."

"Well, then, there is my hand, De Montigni," said Mademoiselle d'Albret, "and I am yours. I do not doubt you, Louis, I do not doubt you; but in these things woman may well be timid; for her all is at stake; and God knows those we play against are often cheats."

"Such am not I, dear Rose," replied her lover. "Come, my Rose, come!" and stepping out of the window, he held his hands towards her, to guide her in the descent.

Rose d'Albret closed her eyes, murmured a short prayer to God for protection and assistance in the course before her; and, after pausing one moment more, in lingering hesitation, she put her foot upon the ladder and descended gently, with De Montigni steady-ing her steps. The height was not great, and the next minute her feet were upon the ground between the old château and the walls that defended it. There was no one below, for De Montigni had determined to come alone, in order to avoid all bustle and confusion.

"Now, dear girl, now," he said, "the first step to freedom is taken. Estoc is waiting

for us on the walls; my horses are prepared without; and in five minutes we shall be in liberty."

"But how shall we pass the gates?" asked Rose; "they are always strictly guarded."

"We have placed men that can be depended upon," replied De Montigni, "and the sally port of the south is in the hands of Estoc. This way, dearest, this way, to the bridge."

Their escape, however, was not destined to be effected so easily as they supposed; for when they reached the spot where the flying bridge which we have so often mentioned hung between the château and the outer walls, De Montigni, on looking up, perceived through the dim air of night that it was raised. There was a flight of stone steps, built against the body of the château, from the sort of paved court in which they were, to the door, that communicated with the bridge; and up these De Montigni sprang in a moment, leaving Rose d'Albret below. He found, however, that the chain which suspended the bridge in the air, was padlocked; and, descending again with a noiseless step, he asked his fair companion in a whisper, "Who sleeps in the room on the right?"

"I do not know," replied Rose, "some of Monsieur de Chazeul's servants, I believe."

"There are people talking within," replied De Montigni; "the bridge is up, the chains padlocked; and, even if they were not, the noise of letting it down would call attention. We must go round, dear Rose, to the staircase in the wall."

Rose d'Albret trembled very much; for her agitation was already so great, that any impediment made her heart sink with apprehension; but leaning on De Montigni's arm, she hurried along with him, and soon reached the staircase of which he had spoken, which in another minute led them to the top of the wall.

"Sit here for a moment, dearest," said De Montigni, "while I find Estoc, and do not raise your head above the parapet. He and I may pass for the guards; but the veil and ruff do not well imitate the steel cap and cuirass."

Rose silently did as he bade her, and gazed out, while he was gone, through the neighbouring embrasure. The country through which she was to pass lay before her; but it was all dark and indistinct, like the wide land of the future in the journey of life. There was no star to betoken hope in the sky above; thick clouds, like frowning fate, covered the whole heaven; and though the few heavy drops of rain which had fallen had ceased for the time, there were low sobbing gusts of wind, which seemed to say, that they would soon commence again.

Sad and apprehensive, Rose d'Albret gazed over the scene, and with curious eye strove

to trace out the road along which she was to travel, as one does so often and so vainly in the mortal night which surrounds us here below. Fortunately, however, she had not much time for gloomy meditations. In less than two minutes De Montigni was by her side again, accompanied by Estoc, who bent down and kissed her hand, saying, "Come, mademoiselle, come, don't be frightened about the bridge being up, that is done against those on the outside of the wall, not those on the in. We will soon reach the sally port; but we must cross the court first."

"But who are those that Monsieur de Montigni heard talking in the room to the right of the bridge door?" asked Rose d'Albret in a whisper.

"On my body and life I do not know," replied Estoc; "some of Chazeul's people, about no good, I'll warrant; but they'd better not come near us, or I'll split their skulls and his too, if he meddles. This way, mademoiselle."

"Hush!" cried Rose, drawing back, "there is a man coming along the wall. Oh, Heaven! who can it be?"

"Nobody but Paul the sentinel," replied Estoc. "I placed him here on guard, lady, and he knows his business. Come!" and leading her on, he passed close by the warder, who for his part, when they approached, turned his back to them, and gazed out over the country.

To witness such a thorough understanding between her companions and the guards, restored some degree of confidence and hope to Rose d'Albret; and, hurrying forward, they descended the stairs by which she had mounted, chose the second archway in the body of the building, and crossed the vacant court, where all was still and silent, except a large eagle which was chained to a perch in the midst, and which, disturbed in its reveries by their passing near, flapped its large wings, and uttered a shrill cry. Taking through another archway on the opposite side of the court, they threaded one or two of the passages of the building, and soon reached a paved passage, or *coulisse*, similar to that which ran between the château and the wall on the northern side. As they walked along, Rose remarked that De Montigni drew round to the side of Estoc, and whispered something in his ear.

"I do not know," replied the old soldier; "I placed him there not ten minutes ago. Perhaps he is standing under the arch."

"I do not think it," said De Montigni; "there is no depth to hide him; and I can see no one."

"My eyes are not so good as they were," answered Estoc; "but he may have opened the door for aught we know, to have all ready."

"What is the matter?" asked Mademoiselle d'Albret, clinging to De Montigni's arm; "what has gone amiss?"

"Nothing, dearest, nothing," replied De Montigni. "'Tis only that we do not see the guard who was placed with the keys of the sally port. He may, perhaps, have opened the door and gone in; or he may have walked on to the end."

When they reached the low-browed door in the wall, however, which was to give them exit from the château of Marzay, they found no one there, and the heavy iron-covered gate tightly locked. Swearing an oath or two in an undertone, Estoc looked up and down the passage to see if he could perceive the careless warder, but nothing was to be discovered, and no sound or footfall gave notice that he was near.

"Stay," said the old soldier; "stay a moment here, I will go and seek for him. I cannot understand this at all. Yet there can be no danger, lady, so do not be afraid; for if anything were discovered, we should find people enough here."

"But if any one should come, while you are gone?" asked Rose d'Albret, in a faltering tone.

"Why, then, you must hide yourselves amongst those passages opposite," replied the old soldier. "You know them well, both of you, for many a hunt have I had after you amongst them when you were children."

Notwithstanding all her apprehensions, Rose d'Albret could but smile as the old man's words brought up before her mind the picture of the happy hours of childhood; and she laid her hand fondly on De Montigni's arm, feeling that she did love him truly, and had loved him longer than she once thought she had.

"Let us go at once, Louis," she said, "into what we used to call the labyrinth; they would not find us easily there, and we can watch till he comes back."

"Ay, ay," said Estoc; "go there, pretty lady. I will not be a minute, for the man cannot be far off."

Thus saying he left them, and crossing the passage they entered an arch, a little way farther down, which communicated with some of the inferior parts of the building but little used by the household, and was traversed by narrow stone corridors, with innumerable staircases to rooms above. Placing themselves under the shelter of the vault they waited, listening to the old soldier's receding step; but the momentary light which had come up in Rose d'Albret's mind, at his allusion to former days, passed rapidly away as she stood there with her lover, uncertain of what the next hour might bring forth.

The moment after, they heard the neigh of a horse beyond the walls, and De Montigni, turning to her, whispered, "There is but a little space between us and safety, Rose."

"Alas! it may be enough," replied Rose d'Albret, "to bar us from all our hopes."

"Nay, nay," answered her lover; "take not such a gloomy view of it, dear one; there are always small obstacles to every scheme; but these will be soon removed, and all will go well."

"God grant it," said Rose d'Albret; but even as she spoke she drew back farther within the arch, saying, "Hush! there are figures upon the wall."

"Stand, give the word," cried a sentinel above.

"I forget it," replied the voice of Chazeul; "but you know me, my man? You know Monsieur de Chazeul?"

"I know no one without the word," replied the soldier. "Stand off, or you are a dead man!"

"Dare you be so insolent?" exclaimed Chazeul. "Who commands the guard to-night?"

"I do my duty, sir," replied the soldier; "so stand back, I say! It is Monsieur de l'Estoc's guard."

"I thought so," replied Chazeul; "like master like man. Go and call him, sir."

"Not I," answered the soldier; "I do not quit my post for any one. You can call him yourself, if you want him."

"I will," replied Chazeul sternly, "and have you punished for your insolence;" and turning back along the wall, he proceeded to search for Estoc.

directed to its fixed purpose by Almighty wisdom, and infinite goodness.

"He is gone!" whispered De Montigni to Rose d'Albret, as Chazeul strode away. "You see it is fortunate, dear girl, that we did not find the sally port open, or we should have been passing just at the moment he was upon the walls above. He could not have stayed us, it is true, for we have a large party in the castle; but it might have occasioned strife, and that I would fain avoid."

"Oh yes, yes!" said Rose. "God grant that we may escape that—but hark! it is raining, Louis."

"That is unlucky," replied De Montigni. Yet, in truth, it was far from unfortunate for the success of their scheme. The large drops which began to descend in a heavy shower soon changed the purpose of Nicholas de Chazeul, who was lightly clothed, and somewhat careful of his own person; and instead of seeking Estoc, as he had intended, he hurried back to his own chamber, cast off his wet clothes, and retired to bed, keeping his indignation for the following morning.

In the meanwhile Louis De Montigni and Rose d'Albret remained for some minutes longer under the archway; and, although apprehension and anxiety had a large share in the fair lady's feelings, it must not be denied that there were sweet and happy sensations too. With her arm twined through that of her lover, with her hand clasped in his, she felt all the joy, the thrilling and inexpressible joy of loving, trusting, confiding; and she felt it too for the first time. All the freshness of the young heart was there; that freshness which in all things is the point of perfection—the moment of expansion to the flower; the hour of ripeness to the fruit, when colour, and beauty, and scent, and flavour, and delight, are all at their full before one petal has fallen or withered, before one tint has faded, before the bloom has been brushed off, before the enjoyment has palled, or the fine edge of sensation has been blunted. There are feelings in the human heart, and they are the brightest of those which have any reference to earth, which are like those small delicate flies, that live but an hour in their beauty, and then pass away, unable to sustain even the weight of the common air; and with Rose d'Albret that was the moment of their existence. She had never before known what it was to give the whole heart, to cling to another, as if in him she had a second life; to look to him for all her future joy; to trust in him for aid, protection and support; to fear for him more than for herself; to believe her best gift was to render him happy. The world in which she had

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE.

THE small evils of life, against which, in the narrowness of our views, and the idleness of our heart, we so often pray, as if they were as hideous as unmasked sin, how often do they work for us the greatest benefits in ways we never dreamt of!—how often do they even forward us in the very course they seemed likely to obstruct! There is not a hair of our head that is not numbered; there is not a sparrow falls to the ground unmarked; so we were told by Him who is Truth; and surely there is not an act or incident of our life that has not its end and objects in the great scheme of our being, and in the greater scheme of universal nature. Pleasant is it, and sweet to contemplate, for the eye of faith, that all is ruled and

lived, was a cold and dreary one ; there had been no heart which had sympathies with hers ; no voice to reciprocate kind words ; no mind with which to exchange the thoughts that were busy in her own. All who surrounded her were different from her in years, in ideas, in feelings, in objects. It was a dark and shadowy state of being, whose only light had been memory, memory of him who now stood beside her till he himself had returned, like her morning star, and the day of love had dawned upon her heart, driving the shades away, and gilding even the clouds that still hung over the sky.

Thus, though dread and apprehension still had some share in her feelings, poor Rose d'Albret was not now without a bright portion of happiness ; and the gentle pressure of the hand, the mute caress, the word of tenderness and comfort from her lover's lips, produced sensations in her bosom which he did not know, which, perhaps, man never fully knows, in his dealings with woman.

At length there came a hurried tread, as if more than one person were approaching, and De Montigni took a step forward before his fair companion, and loosened his sword in the scabbard. The rain was falling heavily ; the night had become doubly dark ; and he could only distinguish the forms of two men advancing quickly along the *coulisse*, without being able to discover who they were. One he thought indeed was Estoc, but he was not sure, till at length the man on the right hand paused opposite the sally port, and appeared to unlock the door, while the other came on towards the spot where he stood.

"It is Estoc, dear Rose !" he said ; "it is Estoc with the keys."

"Be sure, be sure !" whispered Rose, laying her hand upon his arm ; but the next instant Estoc himself stood before them, saying, "Quick, Louis ! quick ! there are more people stirring in the château than we wot of."

"Chazeul was on the walls but a moment ago," replied De Montigni, "but the sentinel would not let him pass."

"I know, I know," replied Estoc. "I heard it all, but the rain has driven him in, the white-livered knave. You will get sadly wet, sweet lady, I fear."

"Oh, I mind not a little rain," replied Rose d'Albret. "How often have you seen me drenched in hunting, Estoc ; and it will not hurt me more now, that I am being hunted, but what was the cause of the delay ?"

"They had given the man the wrong key," replied Estoc, "and he knew not how to get the right one, without betraying that there was something secret going on—the door is open now, however. Let us be quick.

Hark ! there is two ! Moments are precious."

"I am quite ready," said Rose ; but De Montigni, before he suffered her to issue forth into the rain, covered her as well as he could with his cloak, though the short mantles of those days afforded but a very inefficient protection against a heavy shower. They then crossed the passage, and gliding along under the wall, found the door of the sally port open, and the guard holding it back.

"God bless you, lady ! God bless you, sir," said the man as they passed. And the prayer of a plain and honest heart for our welfare has always its effect in comforting and reassuring.

Estoc led the way, along the stone-faced court, under the earthen mound, which there defended the wall, across a little bridge over the ditch, and through the gate beyond, which he unlocked to let them pass. Beneath the shadow of the gate, and three or four old trees, which grew beside it, stood a party of seven or eight men, with their hands upon their horses' bridles, ready to mount in a moment. Two other saddled horses were amongst them, and while De Montigni lifted Rose d'Albret lightly from the ground, and mounted her securely, old Estoc said, in a low voice, "It is your own limousin, mademoiselle, so you know his mouth, and he knows your hand."

"Thank you, thank you for your kindness, Estoc," replied the lady ; "these are moments never to be forgotten."

De Montigni pressed the old soldier in his arms ; and then saying, "We shall meet again soon, Estoc, I hope, in the king's camp," he sprang upon his horse's back, and laying his hand upon Rose's rein, to lead her forward through the darkness, set out upon the road to Dreux.

Estoc turned back into the castle, closed the gates behind him, made a turn upon the ramparts, listened for a few minutes till he could hear no more the retreating sound of horses' feet, and then retiring to the guard-room, under the principal gate, dried himself by the blazing logs upon the hearth. In a few minutes, however, he gave some orders to one of the soldiers, who was sitting near, and then stretching himself upon a camp bedstead in the corner, was soon sound asleep.

Everything remained quiet in the château during the night. Unconscious of what had taken place, those whose cunning schemes had been frustrated, remained in the tranquil slumber of imaginary success, dreaming of the coming day, and of seeing the seal put upon their intrigues by the voluntary renunciation of De Montigni's right, through which, not only the much coveted estates of

Liancourt, but the hand of Rose d'Albret, and the inheritance which that hand conveyed, were, they thought, to be lost to him, for whom they were originally intended.

The only person who slept but little, was the old Commander De Liancourt, who, partly on account of the pain of his wounds, and partly from anxiety for his nephew's safety and success, lay tossing on his bed till within an hour of morning, wondering if all had gone right, and repeating, a thousand and a thousand times, "All is quiet! They must have got off; otherwise, I should have heard something."

With the first dawn of day, some of the inferior servants began to stir in the house. The scullions proceeded to their abhorred task of scouring the brazen pots and kettles in the kitchen; the turnspit dog waddled slowly from the hearth, the scene of his daily toil, where he found warmth and repose during the night, to hide himself in some corner from the eyes of the persecuting cook; and various other drudges, well called *femmes de peine*, went through the different halls and chambers, clearing off that dust which rises from the decay of every earthly thing, and falls every hour—a memento, if we would but see it, of the perishable nature of all here below—upon the polish and the gilding with which we seek to cover all the coarse materials from our eyes.

Soon the higher functionaries began to appear upon the scene; cooks, and grooms of the chambers, and all the officers and attendants who, in those days, thronged the house of a French nobleman; and then the masters themselves. First, came father Walter, in his black garments, pacing up and down the hall, and gazing, from time to time, out of the high windows at the rainy sky. He was soon joined by Monsieur de Chazeul, followed, shortly after, by the Count de Liancourt. These three continued, stretching their limbs by a walk up and down the wide pavement, for near half an hour, conversing over all that had taken place the day before, and speculating upon the coming event. Chazeul related to his two companions the intelligence he had received from Blanchette on the preceding night, and the application which De Montigni had made for another interview with Rose d'Albret.

"That was not right," said Monsieur de Liancourt. "One interview was all he asked; that was granted, and he ought not to have sought more."

How boldly do we judge of what is right and wrong in the conduct of others! how boldly do we censure and condemn, very often when we are doing them the bitterest injustice! Monsieur de Liancourt totally forgot, when he talked of right, that Louis de Montigni was really entitled, not only to

one interview with Rose d'Albret, but to every hour of her time, to her hand, to her heart, to her fortune,—he totally forgot it, I say, and thought that the schemes which he had so long nurtured, the ideas which he had so long indulged, formed the only standard by which to measure the conduct and the rights of others. Do not let the reader suppose this unnatural. Let him look around, he will find the same perversion of views in every country, in every house, in every family; let him look within, he will find it more or less in his own heart, whenever his own interests, wishes, prejudices, or passions, are placed in opposition to the rights of others.

At length, when about half an hour had passed, the count began to think it strange that his fair ward, who was always an early riser, had not yet appeared, and asked if the others had seen anything of her.

"No," replied Chazeul. "I suppose, as she cannot take her favourite walk this rainy day, she keeps her own chamber, to be out of the way of De Montigni."

The priest looked down and mused, for he entertained some doubts as to Rose's feelings being exactly those which Chazeul's vanity led him to suppose, though, it must be remarked, he had not the slightest suspicion of the event which had just taken place.

"Have you seen Blanchette this morning?" inquired the count.

"No," replied Chazeul; "but I will send my knave, Alphonso, to see after her. It will but be courteous to inquire for her mistress's health."

He was turning towards the door, when his mother entered, and asked at once, "Where is Rose?"

"She has not appeared yet," replied Chazeul. "I am just going to inquire after her, most noble dame."

"See, see yourself, Nicholas," cried the marchioness, sharply. "One of my girls tells me, that, passing by her door just now, she heard a knocking as if carpenters were at work. Is De Montigni absent, too? Why, it is near the hour of mass!"

Chazeul left the room instantly, by the door which led direct along the corridor, to the apartments of Rose d'Albret. All was still, however; the noise which his mother mentioned had ceased: and it was not till he came close to the antechamber that he thought he heard a sound of moaning, as if some one was giving way to the expression of pain or grief. He instantly knocked at the door, and called to Blanchette, who demanded, in a voice half-drowned by tears, "Who is there?"

"It is I," replied the marquis. "What is the matter, Blanchette? Open the door let me in."

"I cannot," replied Blanchette; "the door is locked, and I can't get out."

"How is your mistress?" asked Chazeul.

"I do not know," replied the girl.

"Well, go in and see, then," said the marquis.

"I cannot," rejoined Blanchette again; "that door is fastened too."

A sudden suspicion of the truth flashed through the mind of Chazeul, and he stood for a moment, stupefied with surprise and anger. Then hastening back to the hall, he exclaimed, "Something is wrong! The girl Blanchette is locked into her room. We must force the door."

"To the window! to the window!" replied the marchioness; and, hurrying out to the flying bridge, they descended the stone steps into the *coulisse*, Monsieur de Liancourt exclaiming,

"Quick! some one bring a ladder."

"There is no ladder needed, my wise brother," said Madame de Chazeul, the moment after, pointing with her hand to the spot where, underneath the window of Rose's chamber, might still be seen the instrument used in her escape. "You will find one ready. Those who like to go on in the rain, and see the nest of the flown bird, may go, I shall return to the hall." And thus saying, she ascended the steps, while the rest of the party hurried on.

By the ladder easy access was obtained to the room of Mademoiselle d'Albret; and it is not necessary to detail the state in which it was found. Rose, as the reader is aware, was no longer there, and all that remained for those that sought her, was to liberate Blanchette, and inquire when, how, and why, her mistress had fled.

The girl, however, could tell them nothing of the truth; and, though she made up for the deficiency by telling plenty of falsehoods, endeavouring in the fear and agitation of the moment, to screen herself from suspicions which were never directed towards her, yet her information, of having heard her mistress move in her chamber about three o'clock in the morning, without thinking anything of it, of having visited her the last thing before she went to bed herself, and seeing her soundly asleep in bed, together with sundry other fanciful pieces of intelligence, proved not in the least satisfactory to the hearers.

After much wonders, and some consideration, and a good deal of examination in the apartments of Mademoiselle d'Albret, the party were obliged to make their egress by the window again, the outer door being locked and the key gone.

They found Madame de Chazeul in the hall, with an angry spot upon her cheek, and her brow knit, while the old commander, dressed

as if for a journey, with his sword by his side, and the cross of his order round his neck, sat upon a bench at one side of the hall, tapping his leg deliberately with his staff.

"I am glad you are come, count," said the marchioness; "here is our brother Michael evidently knows all about this infamous abduction; but he will make no answer to my inquiries."

"Why, I told you I would not, Jacqueline, till Liancourt came," replied the commander. "Now he is come, I will tell you all I know, and also perform the task I took upon me yesterday."

"Well, sir, well, be quick," replied the count, "I have borne your humours too long; and I will endure no tricks and treachery, depend upon it."

The old soldier's cheek grew warm. "No tricks but your own, sir," he replied. "But we all know you are a tool in the hands of others, and therefore to be forgiven, like all weak men, who make themselves the instruments of knaves. Ay, you may stare, Jacqueline; but be good enough to remember, I was never afraid of those black eyes, even when the cheeks were round and soft, and am not more timid now, when they are shrivelled and skinny. The simple matter of fact is this, Anthony, you have all laid your heads together to deprive Louis de Montigni, the son of our poor sister, Louise, of the inheritance which I renounced in her favour, and in favour of her children. I did not renounce it in your favour, Madame Jacqueline; for you were always able to take care of yourself, though Louise was mild and gentle, and consequently continually kept down, and deprived of just estimation."

"And may I ask, sir," said Monsieur de Liancourt, with a cold and haughty air, "what business it was of yours, if Monsieur de Montigni choose to renounce also?"

"I don't know that," replied the old commander; "he cannot renounce without my returning to my rights. However, I would have made no noise about that, if he had done so willingly, and with his eyes open. But I did not choose to have him deceived, and so I was resolved he should know all. The priest there, like an honest man, told him that he had some right to the estates, and I told him what."

The marchioness turned a fierce look upon father Walter, who met it with a calm and tranquil air, apparently in no degree taken by surprise or annoyed.

"But I told him, moreover, my good brother," continued the commander, "that if he gave up the estates, he gave up his claim and right to the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret, — to our sweet Rose. It is right that every one should know how he stands, and what he

does, brother Anthony; and as you did not tell him, I did. I told him the contract was in his favour, not in that of yonder gentleman in ruffs and ear-rings, inasmuch as it engaged for the marriage of the young lady to the heir of Liancourt, which he is by my renunciation; and if he had given up his claim, I would have married her myself; for then I should be heir of Liancourt again. But as I am old, and somewhat battered in the wars, and should limp a little in following a bride through a ball-room, he thought fit to save me the trouble, and consequently determined to hold his own."

"My son, my son, this is no jesting matter," said father Walter in a grave tone; "I beseech you, what you have to speak, speak seriously."

"If I speak seriously, sir priest," replied the old soldier, "I may have to say things not very palatable to many here present. But if it must be, so it shall be. In a word, then, brother, he found that he had been deceived, kept in ignorance, cajoled to part with rights concealed from him. Had it been but the estates, he would have given them up at a word, as I did; but he would not give up her he loved, except at her own request. In this, too, he discovered he had been cheated. Instead of finding that she had freely and willingly promised her hand to a man who possessed her heart, he learned that she too had been misled into the belief that she was contracted to yonder gentleman, and that she was about, unwillingly, to yield to what she thought duty—poor thing! without either loving or having promised at all."

"But she did promise," exclaimed Chazeul. "I call upon all here to witness it."

"That's a lie!" answered the commander sternly; "nor the first, good nephew, by many! She never promised; for only two days ago I heard her ask a short time to consider. You cannot deny it, priest."

"I cannot," said father Walter.

"Well then," continued the old officer, "he asked to see her alone, to learn her own mind—"

"We did not know that he was going thus treacherously—" cried Chazeul.

"To tell her the truth," interrupted the commander; "or you would have taken care to prevent it. But when he had enlightened her on those subjects and found that she very much preferred himself to you, he suggested to her that, to save needless trouble and dispute, it would be better for her to take her departure at once with the husband of her father's choice, and, placing themselves under the protection of the king, demand his sanction to their immediate marriage. Ay, *the king!* nephew, the king, father Walter—Henry the Fourth, king of France and

Navarre, who is so and will be so whether it pleases you or not! But I forgot," he added, "the boy left a letter with me for you, brother Anthony. Ho! Estoc there, get me that letter, pray."

While this delectable conversation had been proceeding, Madame de Chazeul had seated herself in the chair usually occupied by the count, and, leaning her head upon her hand, had seemed more busied with her own thoughts than with anything that was going on around; but at the mention of the letter she raised her head with a bitter sneer upon her lip, asking, "Pray, whose manufacture is the epistle? Is it an extract from Caesar's Commentaries by the Commander de Liancourt, or a parody upon Ovid's Art of Love by Monsieur de Montigni?"

"Neither, Jacqueline," replied her brother, "but a good honest letter, from a youth whom you have not been able to cheat, with all your cunning. The letter—the letter, Estoc," he continued, as his old comrade put his head into the hall—"Where is Louis's letter? You had it."

"Oh ay! of course he had it," cried Chazeul, as the good soldier advanced with a paper in his hand; and then turning round, the marquis whispered for an instant to the count, who, after taking the letter from the hands of Estoc, made him a sign to stay.

"You know of all this affair, sir," said Monsieur de Liancourt, fixing his eyes upon him, "and gave aid and encouragement."

"I saw them at the last moment," replied Estoc at once, "and had they wanted encouragement would have given it to them; but they did not; and as to aiding them, I had no commands to stop any one quitting the castle."

"It was your duty, sir, to stop any fugitives from authority," replied the count; "and I have a great mind to punish you."

"To do that you have no power, sir," answered Estoc; "you forget I am not your servant, Count of Liancourt, but a gentleman and a soldier, though a poor one. I have, at the desire of my good old commander here, aided you voluntarily to keep your château in these troublous times; but I have taken no wage nor pay from you or yours; and, let me tell you, he is a bold man that talks of punishing a French gentleman that has done no wrong."

"Come, come, Anthony," cried the commander, "no folly, if you please. Estoc is my *guidon*; you have nought to do with him. If there be fault, it is mine. I aided, I encouraged them; I told them to go, and helped them to do it; and whoever says I had not a right to do so, lies in his teeth! But read the letter, brother o' mine; for you may have something to say to it; and I am

away this morning. My litter and my men are ready in the court."

"And the sooner you go, Michael, the better," said Madame de Chazeul.

"Not at your bidding, Jacqueline," replied the commander, while his brother opened the letter and read it. "Ay, here comes your creature, Blanchette. On my life, this has been a pretty honest scheme from the beginning."

"What does he say?" inquired the marchioness, as the count read.

"Oh, hear it, hear it!" answered Monsieur de Liancourt; "you will then see how grateful he is for all the care and kindness I have bestowed upon his youth;" and he proceeded to read as follows:—

"SIR, MY UNCLE,—Before this reaches your hands, I shall be far distant, feeling myself compelled to take a step, which nothing but the desire of avoiding that strife and contention which must ensue, were I to stay and urge my rights in your house, would induce me to adopt. At the same time it is necessary, for my own justification, that I should give some explanation of my conduct. You were pleased on my arrival, to ask for my signature to certain papers, which, on examination of the documents themselves, and consultation with my uncle, the commander, and others, I found implied a renunciation of my clear right to the estates of Liancourt, and the acceptance of certain benefices as an equivalent. Had that been the only question, I would not have scrupled to consent; but I found that by a contract between you and the late Count de Marennnes, made while I was considered certain heir to those estates, the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret was promised to the person inheriting them. You had given me to understand that the lady's inclination led her to an union with my cousin De Chazeul; and had it been so, my love for her is too sincere, not to have induced me at once to remove every obstacle that my prior claim produced. But certain circumstances led me to believe that in this there was an error; and I therefore required an interview with Mademoiselle d'Albret, that both she and I might know our real situation, which, by your pardon, let me say, had been concealed from both. I found, during that interview, that she had been deceived into the belief that, in giving her hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, she was only fulfilling her father's contract. When the truth, however, was explained to her, I found that, far from desiring such an alliance, it was most repugnant to her, and that, on the contrary, she was willing to give her hand to him for whom it had been truly destined. We both saw, that to urge my rights in person here,

would necessarily produce strife—nay, perhaps bloodshed; and we were well aware that it might be unsafe for her to remain after I was gone, as there are too many instances, in these days, of contracts forcibly violated, and compulsion used to produce alliances neither prompted by inclination nor justified by law. The course which had been pursued towards us for the last five years, led us to apprehend that such might be the case now; and to avoid such a result, Mademoiselle d'Albret consented to accompany me to the court of his majesty; where, under his sanction and authority, I trust soon to fulfil with her the engagement between her father and yourself. As soon as that is accomplished, being in this matter moved by no sordid considerations, you will not find me indisposed, in gratitude for the care and protection which you bestowed on my early youth, to fulfil your wishes, whatever they may be, in regard to the disposal of your property, even to the sacrifice of what may be my own contingent rights. May God keep you in his Holy guard!

"Your nephew,

"LOUIS DE MONTIGNI."

The latter part of the letter was but little attended to by Madame de Chazeul or her son, who were busily talking together in tones so low, that but a word or two only was distinguishable even by the quick ears of the priest, who stood near them.

"Impossible!" said Chazeul, in reply to something which his mother appeared to have suggested: "we have not men enough. He has fifteen of his own old soldiers here; and a number of the men of Liancourt would take his part. I have but seven in the castle. No, it is impossible."

The countess muttered something in return, and then added, "Stay, Chazeul: a better plan!" She then whispered a word or two, which escaped all ears but those of her son, adding, "You see to it: bid him come back at full speed when he has seen them housed. Send notice to Nemours, too, and Mayenne; so you will have them in a net. In the meantime, stop this farce as soon as possible. I have a word or two to say to another personage:—Good father, I would fain speak with you," she continued aloud, addressing Walter de la Tremblade, "either before or after mass."

"Which you please, daughter," replied Walter de la Tremblade; "we have still half an hour."

"That will be enough," answered the marchioness, rising: "and so, good-day, good brother Michael. Like all fools who meddle with what does not concern them, you will one day rue the mischief that you have now made."

"Never, Jacqueline," replied the commander. "I am not so famous for scheming as you are; but, be you sure that, whatever you may be now plotting, I will find means to put it out of joint with plain honesty and truth, as I have done to-day. Farewell, brother Anthony," he continued; "let us not part bad friends; for what I have done has been as much to save your honour as anything else."

He held out his hand as he spoke; but the count put his behind his back, saying, "My honour can take care of itself, Michael; and I do not thank you for this insolent meddling."

"Poor man!" said the commander; and, turning abruptly away, he strode out of the hall, followed by Estoc.

CHAPTER XV.

FATHER WALTER'S REASONS.

THERE are dull pauses in human life when the mind, however anxious it may be to speed forward upon its active career, is forced by circumstances to halt and deal with minor things; as a traveller on foot, however eager he may be to hasten forward upon his way, is sometimes obliged to stop and take a small stone out of his shoe, lest it should impede the whole afterpart of his journey; and thus, though we would willingly go on with those in whom we are more interested, we must linger for a moment or two with the priest and Madame de Chazeul, in order to proceed more rapidly when we have related some things which, though not very entertaining, are absolutely necessary to the right understanding of this history.

The lady led the way to her own chamber, with a step which she intended to be perfectly calm and tranquil, but which, by its occasional irregularity and sharp jerking movement, betrayed the agitated and angry feelings which she struggled to conceal. The priest followed, with his still, even pace, his large dark eyes as usual bent down, and not a trace of any emotion upon his countenance. He seemed, indeed, like a moving statue, to the countenance of which the sculptor had successfully endeavoured to give an expression of great thought, of mind, and equanimity, but not of feeling or emotion.

When they reached the lady's chamber, the Marchioness de Chazeul took a seat, and pointed to another, with a somewhat haughty wave of the hand; but father Walter sat down deliberately, and crossing one foot over the other, remained in an easy attitude waiting for Madame de Chazeul to

begin, as if totally unconscious that there were any angry feelings in her bosom towards himself. He made no inquiry, even by a look, in regard to the nature of the communication which he was about to receive, but calmly bent his head a little forward as if to listen, and waited for her to begin.

"Well, Monsieur de la Tremblade," said the lady at length, "so you have thought fit to commence this system of sweet candour towards Monsieur de Montigni, and to tell him that he has a right to the estates."

"I always advocated candour, madam," replied the priest; "and if my advice had been followed, and the exact state of the case had been told him in Italy, with a request that he would remove all obstacles, he would have remained where he was, and you would not have been in such an unpleasant situation at present."

"And therefore, I suppose, because people judged differently from yourself," said the marchioness, "you thought fit to spoil their plans, when yours were not adopted."

"Not exactly," answered father Walter, perfectly unmoved; "I only acted as was right and fitting on the occasion. I betrayed no secrets, lady; I gave no further information than was merely necessary to induce this young gentleman to do what was required of him. The very act of renunciation itself bore upon its face the acknowledgment that he had rights; and I did not in any degree define them, but merely said, that it was necessary he should sign the papers, to guard against any legal contest hereafter."

"Pshaw!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "do you think I do not see your motives, Walter de la Tremblade? You would fain have so managed that the greater part of the benefices, if not the whole, should fall into your hands. You were not content with the Abbey of Chizay—not you! You must have more: and now a fine business you have made of it, for you have lost all to yourself and to us too."

The slightest possible glow passed over the cheek of Walter de la Tremblade; but he replied, without the least alteration of tone, "You are wrong in your suspicions, daughter; and they are unworthy of you or me."

"Quite worthy of me," replied the marchioness, "for I like to see to the bottom of men's hearts. Now, I will answer for it, you persuaded him that it was very improper for laymen to hold the property of the Church; you showed him, that he could not conscientiously keep these benefices, if he got them, without taking the gown. Ha! have I touched you? can you deny it, sir?"

"Entirely," replied father Walter. "He stated such objections himself; and it was not for me to argue against my conscience. I told him, however, that it was a constant

practice in France for men, not ecclesiastics, to hold such benefices. The objections were his, not mine, though how you came to learn they were ever made, I know not, as his conduct turned upon very different feelings."

"How I came to learn!" exclaimed the marchioness, with a scornful smile; "because I know you both right well—by no other means, good father. Oh! I understand the whole. Think you I have lived for fifty years, with my eyes open, in this busy world, and do not know how a calm, quiet priest, by a few soft, half-whispered words, can instil doubts and insinuate his own views into the mind of a weak-hearted youth; how by a look, or even a faint denial of that which he seeks most strongly to impress, he can produce the effect desired, when seeming to oppose it."

"Madam, you are very learned in such arts," replied father Walter, with a slight sarcastic curl of the lip.

"I am," answered the marchioness, boldly, "and I know that father Walter can make use of them as well as others. But there is such a thing as overreaching one's self, sir; and methinks you have done so in this instance."

"Not in the least, daughter," replied the priest. "I am quite contented, if you are."

"But I am not!" cried the marchioness, vehemently, "and I will have no more of this. You think the game is lost; and therefore, with the cunning of your cloth, you bear it tranquilly. I know that it is not so hopeless as you imagine; and for that reason I take the trouble of telling you, that if I recover the false steps taken, I will not be frustrated by you."

She spoke angrily and haughtily; and then, as if feeling that she had given too much way to passion, she rose, went to the window, gazed out for a moment, and played with the embroidery on her dress. Father Walter, in the meanwhile, remained calm and silent; not that thought, ay, and even passion, were less busy in his own bosom than in hers; but he was more habituated to command his own sensations, and to keep them, like those under-currents of the sea which carry ships far astray, without producing a ripple on the surface, from showing by any outward sign the course in which they were bent.

At length the marchioness returned, with a smothered brow and more placable look. "Come, father Walter," she said, "we must not quarrel; we are needful to each other. Let us act together, and depend upon it, the interests of both will be better served by so doing, than if each pursued a course apart."

"I deny that I have ever acted otherwise, daughter," replied the priest. "I am glad to hear you have hopes of retrieving what

has gone wrong; and I will aid you to the very utmost of my power, not only to wrest from Monsieur de Montigni the estates of Liancourt, but also to unite Mademoiselle d'Albret to your son. There are a few things that I would not undertake to accomplish this; but not from the motives you imagine—from very, very different reasons."

"What may they be?" inquired the marchioness; "if you promote my views, boldly and unhesitatingly, and I can aid yours, I will, without scruple. What may they be, good father?"

"Listen then, daughter," replied the priest. "To an ecclesiastic of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, there are objects far higher, far nearer to his heart than any interests of his own. Indeed, rightly speaking, we should have no interest but one, though human weakness will occasionally have its share. When we enter into that body to which I belong, we lose our identity, we become but part of a great whole, we merge all our own passions, hopes, wishes, desires, all our personal feelings and views, in those of the Church, and for her interests, as the highest object at which we can aim, we are justified in taking means, and performing acts, which we should consider culpable, were they undertaken for any individual end."

"Well, father," said the marchioness, as he paused, "to what does this tend?"

"To a very important point, daughter," replied the priest. "This young man, this De Montigni, boldly and straightforwardly acknowledges the heretic, Henry de Bourbon, as King of France. 'Tis but the day before yesterday, that, for the deliverance of the heretic named Chasseron, a man, who, I hear, made himself bitterly obnoxious during what is called the Lover's War, he charged and put to death several good Catholics of the League. One of them was brought in here severely wounded, and I confessed him last night before his death. The youth is, even now, gone to join his heretic monarch, excommunicated by the head of the Christian Church, and deprived by him of all right and title to the allegiance of any but heretics like himself. Think you, lady, that a priest of the true religion would willingly see estates and power in the hands of such a one? No, daughter, no; and I believe that any scheme would be justifiable to deprive him of the means of injuring the Church, of upholding heretics and infidels, and of overthrowing all true religion in this realm. It is with great difficulty I have kept your brother—whose wavering weakness in such things I need not tell you—from acknowledging Henry of Bourbon; and if his heir goes over to that side, all my pains are lost. It has been for these causes that I

have joined heart and hand in endeavouring to bring about the marriage between Made-moiselle d'Albret and Monsieur de Chazeul, one of the brightest ornaments of the Holy Catholic Union; and you have done me great wrong in supposing that any private interest, whatsoever, would induce me to risk, even by a word, the great object I have in view."

"Perhaps I have," replied the marchioness; "but yet, father, it was imprudent to let this youth know that he had any rights."

"Not at all," replied the priest, somewhat sternly. "That fact could not be concealed. The very papers showed it, and the attempt to keep it back naturally produced suspicion and inquiry. If others had played their part as well as I did, and had watched carefully to prevent all communication between your brother Michael and his nephew, till De Montigni had signed, no harm would have arisen; but my advice was ill followed; they were suffered to meet in private—how, and when, I know not; but five minutes was sufficient to do all the mischief. And now it is necessary that I should know what you are about to do—what are your hopes of retrieving this affair—and what scheme is to be followed for the future."

"What would you advise yourself, father?" inquired the lady, willing to test his sincerity.

"Methinks," answered the priest, "there is but one course to be taken. Lose not a moment longer in vain deliberation, surprise, and recrimination, but raise all the men of Liancourt, and send them out to overtake this runaway ward. A thousand things may occur to stop her. Despatch messengers to Mayenne, Nemours, Aumale, with information of the circumstances. Tell them to cut her off from the king's camp and send her back. Once here, we will find means to deal with her. This is your only chance; but a clue to her course may be gained by the road which the old commander follows. Be you sure that he is going to join them; and it is even not improbable, that they are waiting for him, at no great distance."

"Give me your hand, father Walter," cried the marchioness. "All that you propose is already ordered; and, if we succeed by your assistance, not only Chizay, but another abbey, richer still, shall show our gratitude—"

The priest waived his hand, and she added, with a smile, "to enable you to promote the true interests of the Roman Catholic religion."

Father Walter was about to reply; but at that moment one of the marchioness's women entered the room, saying, "Madam, here are Theodore and one of the men you sent

back to Chazeul, who wish to speak with you directly."

Her mistress made her a sign to be silent, and father Walter, observing her gesture, took his leave and retired.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FLIGHT CONTINUED.

THE night was as black as Acheron. The rain poured down in torrents. The melting of the snow rendered the roads in the lower parts one mass of mud and water, while the higher ground, where the temperature was colder, afforded nothing but a slippery and uncertain footing for the horses, over which they had the greatest difficulty in making their way. There was no possibility of seeing more than four or five yards in advance; the wind blew the falling deluge in the eyes of the whole party; and the heart of Louis De Montigni sank, when he thought of all that Rose d'Albret was exposed to for his sake. He strove to cheer her, however, as she rode beside him; he guided and supported her horse in all the more difficult parts of the way; and often he expressed his fears and apprehensions regarding her, almost regretting that any inducement had led him to bring her forth in such a night as that.

Rose spoke little in return, for her heart was too full of manifold sensations, her mind too busy with thought for many words; but all that she did say was kind, and even cheerful; for she perceived clearly his deep anxiety for her, and strove to lighten the load as much as possible. She assured him that she did not mind the tempest, that she was accustomed to endure such things frequently, that her jennet was the most sure-footed beast on earth, that she doubted not the sky would soon clear; and when she saw how he reproached himself for all that she was enduring, she reassured him by expressing her joy and thankfulness at having escaped from an union, which every moment's thought rendered more odious in her eyes. Thus they rode on for nearly an hour and an half, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, according to the nature of the ground: the horsemen who accompanied them, keeping as close around them as possible, for even such a dark and stormy night was not without dangers of another kind, from the state of turbulent anarchy into which the country was plunged.

At length, however, the rain suddenly ceased; the air became hot and sultry; the wind died away; and Rose, turning to her lover, exclaimed, "I told you, Louis, it would be finer soon."

Almost as she spoke, a bright blaze flashed over the whole sky, illuminating the prospect on every side, which had before been hidden under the dark veil of night. The trees of the forest on the right, the wide undulating country on the left, the village and the spire in the distance, the valley into which they were descending in front, were all seen for a single instant, as clearly as if the day had suddenly dawned; while, across the very midst of the glare which blazed over the whole heaven, was seen a thin and quivering line of more intense light, beginning near the zenith, and ending apparently at a tree, some two or three hundred yards in advance, several large limbs of which were seen falling to the earth, with a rendering and a crashing sound, just as the darkness swept over the sky again, and all was night once more.

The horses started at the blaze; and Rose d'Albret covered her eyes with her hand, while Louis de Montigni checked the speed at which they were proceeding, saying, "We must go more slowly, dear Rose. This is unfortunate indeed."

"It may be so, Louis," replied his fair companion, "but storm, and tempest, and the fierce turbulence of such a night as this, are nothing in my eyes, compared with the slow and lengthened misery of a home without affection, and the living death of a marriage without love."

"Look! look, sir! look!" cried one of the men, pointing forward to the sky: but the eyes of his master, and of all the party were already fixed on the same spot, where, in the midst of the heaven, one of the most extraordinary phenomena of nature was suddenly presented to them. For a space of several degrees the clouds seemed to have rolled back, and were seen piled up, in enormous masses on either hand, like the scenes flanking a wide stage, while between them spread out an expanse of pale whitish light, with a red wavy streak below, resembling a plain which has caught the purple rays of the setting sun. On either hand, from amongst the masses of vapour, appeared to dash forth bodies of fiery combatants, horse and foot mingled together, rushing, charging, overthrowing each other, now mixed in furious combat, now separating for a moment, now chasing each other over the field. Again and again the squadrons met, as if in deadly shock, and balls of fire, as of some unearthly cannonade, crossed the sky in the midst of that strange scene, till at length, while the fight seemed still going on, the clouds once more rolled over the whole, and all returned to darkness.*

"This is very strange," exclaimed Louis

de Montigni: "I have heard of such a thing; but I never believed it before."

"We shall have a battle soon, sir," said one of the men. "I wish we could have seen which party won the day."

"The king's, to be sure," replied another; "did you not see how he drove them back?"

"And which do you call the king's?" asked the young baron, smiling to see how readily imagination had seized upon the strange sight they had beheld, to turn it to the purposes of superstition.

"That on the right, sir," answered the man. "The king has the right, I am sure; and besides, I saw him in the front rank with a large plume in his casque."

"My eyes were not so good," said De Montigni. "Did you ever see the king, Hugh?"

"Not I, sir," replied the attendant; "but I am certain that was he, and his horse was as red as blood."

His master said nothing in return but rode on slowly, conversing in a low tone with Rose d'Albret, while from time to time the lightning flashed across their path, but less vividly than before; and ere long the rain began to fall again and the thunder ceased.

Now came the most fatiguing part of the journey, for the narrow path which they were following entered the hilly and wooded country about Montlandon and Champrond en Gatine, and they were forced to climb and descend continually, over a road on which the snow was but half melted and the mud up to the fetlocks of their horses, while still the torrents poured down from the sky, drenching their garments through and through. The wind had totally ceased, but the air was more sultry and close than ever; and both horses and riders suffered much from its oppressive warmth.

Rose d'Albret became silent from fatigue, for the agitation of the last twenty-four hours now had its full effect upon her; and fears lest her bodily strength should give way, added to what she suffered. There is a calm and persevering endurance which goes far; there is a light-hearted and hopeful energy which carries one through innumerable evils; but the greatest burden upon all exertion is the fear of failing—if once we let apprehension take possession of us. Rose knew that it is so, and she strove hard, for De Montigni's sake, to banish all such alarm; but the time seemed very weary, the way interminably long. She looked anxiously for the first, grey light of morning. More than once—when at the bottom of a hill—she thought she saw some streaks of light over the brow; and as often she was disappointed, till at length, as they issued forth from a thick forest that then lay between Marolles and the edge of La Beauce, her lover ex-

* This phenomenon was seen distinctly by many persons in both armies, immediately before the battle of Ivry, and was visible over an extent of more than twenty leagues.

claimed gladly, "There, there is the daylight, Rose;" and looking forward, she perceived distinctly the faint hues of coming day stretching over the eastern sky, and the dark walls and towers of the castle of Montlandon on its wooded height, standing out in strong relief.

That castle offers now nothing but a picturesque ruin to the eye of the passing traveller; but, at the time I speak of, it was inhabited; and a beacon fire on one of the turrets, waning in lustre with the rising light, told that its owner took part for one side or the other in the civil war.

"If I remember right," said Louis de Montigni, speaking to the man who acted as their guide, "that is Montlandon; cannot we get shelter there?"

"No, sir, oh no!" replied the soldier. "We must change the colour of our scarfs if we do; for Monsieur de Montlandon is furious for the Union, and a great friend of Monsieur de Chazeul's."

"That is unfortunate indeed," said De Montigni. "Alas! dear Rose, I fear you are well nigh exhausted. Can you go on, my beloved?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Rose, in as cheerful a tone as she could assume; "for another hour, Louis—or two, should it be needed."

"It will not be safe to stop, mademoiselle, till we get to Les Châtelets," observed the attendant, who was one of the old followers of the good Commander de Liancourt, "and that is near three leagues; but the road is better here in Beauce; and we can go faster in the daylight. But we had better use speed, sir, and pass this village and Champromd before the people are awake, or we may find enemies."

"With all my heart," cried Rose d'Albret; "this slow travelling in the darkness is more fatiguing far than a quick pace;" and putting their horses into a brisk canter, they hurried through Montlandon, before any of the cottage windows showed signs of waking life. When they reached Champromd, however, a good many of the villagers were standing out under the shelter of their doors. The greater part, indeed, seemed more terrified at the sight of the body of horsemen, than desirous of impeding their progress, and retreated into their houses as soon as the white scarfs appeared. But one stout blacksmith stood before his forge, and shouted as they passed, "What news from the armies?"

"The king has taken Dreux," replied one of the attendants, in the same loud tone, "and is marching upon Chartres."

"Curses on the Maheutre!" cried the blacksmith, and retired grumbling into his dwelling.

No opposition, however, was offered to their

passage; and at a quick pace they hurried on; but the anxious eye of De Montigni saw that Rose's cheek was very pale, her fair head bent down, and the hand which held her bridle resting on the pommel of the saddle, as if she could hardly manage her reins.

"Ah, dearest girl," he said, "let us stop at the first cottage. You are faint, you are ill."

"No, no," she answered; "I can go on, Louis; I am somewhat tired, but I can go on;" and in about five minutes more their guide exclaimed,

"There is the Eure! We shall soon be safe!"

Such words of encouragement revived the poor girl's strength for a few minutes longer, till a hamlet, containing some half-dozen houses, appeared a little to the left, and De Montigni, without further question, turned his horse's head thither, sprang to the ground at the door of the first cottage, and throwing his arm round his fair companion, lifted her from the saddle.

Rose leaned upon his bosom, for she could not support herself; and, raising her in his arms, he carried her into the hut, where they found a peasant and his young wife taking their early meal. The good people of this place seemed to know little, or care little, of Royalists and Leaguers. They were of the best party, the party of human nature; and the young woman rose eagerly from the table, with expressions of kindly compassion, to assist poor Rose d'Albret, laid her upon her own bed, all dripping as she was, and insisted upon making her put on some of her own apparel, while she dried the lady's wet garments at the fire. Fatigue and exhaustion, however, were the greatest evils under which Rose was suffering; and De Montigni eagerly asked for wine, as her pale cheeks and bloodless lips showed him how faint she felt.

"Here is cider," said the peasant, "but that is poor stuff for such a lady; and wine we have none."

"Run, Victor, run down to the priest's," cried his wife; "you will get wine there."

"Or at Master Leger's," answered the cottager; "he has better wine than the priest."

"I will go myself," cried De Montigni. "Come with me, good man; and, while we are gone, your wife can undress the lady and assist her to bed. A few hours' repose will do her much good."

"I am better now, Louis," said Rose d'Albret, stretching out her hand to him; "do not leave me long. I am afraid of some one coming while you are gone."

"I will be but an instant, dearest Rose," replied her lover, "and in the meanwhile our people shall remain round the house."

You had better take off your wet clothes, dear one;" and he added, with a faint smile, "I have no title to be present at your toilette yet."

The colour came faintly into her cheeks again; and, once more promising not to be many minutes absent, the young nobleman hurried away with the peasant, closing the door behind him, and bidding the attendants remain on guard before the house till he returned.

At the end of the little straggling hamlet stood a house with a projecting pole, from which was suspended a withered bush, giving clear indication that there was the place where village festivals, marriages, and merry makings, usually were celebrated. Here some tolerable wine was easily procured, and, hurrying back with it, De Montigni was soon by the side of her he loved, who, now stretched on the low bed of the good peasants, had already somewhat recovered the rosy look of health, and spoke cheerfully to him of being soon able to proceed.

But De Montigni did not feel so confident of Rose's powers, and inquired anxiously of the peasants, whether any carriage or litter could be procured in the neighbourhood. Nothing of the kind, however, was to be heard of, and they assured him that to seek any conveyance but a horse or a mule nearer than Chartres or Dreux, was quite out of the question. He then proposed to construct a litter in haste, but Rose would not hear of it, declaring that in an hour's time she would be quite ready to pursue her journey on horseback; and, indeed, she seemed so eager to go on, and so fearful of being overtaken, that she would fain have risen even before an hour was over, declaring that she had had rest enough. De Montigni, however, persuaded her to remain for half-an-hour longer; and, going out of the door with their young host, he made some inquiries regarding the state of the country in the neighbourhood, and the best road he could follow towards Dreux.

The replies he received were not altogether satisfactory. Several large bodies of men, the peasant said, had passed through the village the day before; but whether they were Royalists or Leaguers he could not well tell, as he took no great heed of such things, and the soldiers had passed on, without stopping, even to drink. One corps had taken up its quarters for the night, he heard, in a village about a league and a half farther on; but every fact he mentioned showed the young nobleman that it would be needful to use every precaution, during their onward journey, in order to avoid falling into the hands of the Leaguers. For this purpose, he determined to send forward one

of the attendants, with directions to keep about half a mile in advance of the rest of the party, while another preceded them by about three hundred yards, so that early intelligence might be obtained of any approaching danger. A man, too, was left to follow at a little distance behind, for the purpose of guarding against being overtaken suddenly by any party of pursuers from the château of Marzay, though De Montigni had good hope that the speed with which they travelled had removed all risk of such an event.

Everything being prepared, all orders given, the horses refreshed and fed, and Rose d'Albret dressed in the clothes which had been dried before a large wood fire, she was once more placed upon the back of her jennet, and, at a slower pace than before, they again set out upon their journey, after De Montigni had amply paid for all that he had taken. At a distance of about a mile from the village, the man who had been thrown forward, returned to say, that the ropes of the ferryboat over the Eure had been cut by the soldiers, as they passed on the preceding day, and that they must go farther up the stream to seek a ford.

The weather, however, had become somewhat finer. The rain had ceased, except a few drops from a flying cloud, now and then. Rose looked and spoke cheerfully, and seemed really to have recovered from the fatigue she had undergone; the fear of being overtaken had grown fainter with every league they had advanced; and though the Eure was somewhat flooded by the rains that had fallen, they soon found a ford. The marks of horses' feet showed that some persons had passed not long before, and, causing the whole of his little troop to keep on the left, in order to break the force of the water, De Montigni led over the lady's jennet, without much difficulty, and gained the opposite bank.

This obstacle overcome, they proceeded for half an hour more without encountering any fresh impediment; and, giving way to hope and love, they talked of future happiness and bright days to come, and gave way to all the dreams that visit the young heart in the season of fancy and expectation, and clothe the coming years with all the glittering garments of imaginary joy. They were both too young, they were both too inexperienced not to feel the heart rise the moment that danger and apprehension ceased; and, to say truth, though Hope may be—as she is often too justly called—an untiring deceiver, yet, even in the midst of her false promises, she confers real and inestimable benefits, giving us strength to endure and courage to go on, which none of the truer and more substantial things of life can afford.

Thus the happy dreams in which Rose d'Albret and her lover indulged, during that brief half hour, comforted and refreshed her more than the repose she obtained at the cottage; but the pleasant moments were soon interrupted. At the end of the time we have named, the man who was farthest in advance rode back at speed to the one behind him, and, taking his place, sent him back to tell De Montigni that a body of some two hundred horse were moving over the country before them, in the direction of Tremblay. The first soldier had halted; and, riding up with the man who served them as guide, De Montigni asked him, with some anxiety, if he had been seen.

The reply was in the negative; and a consultation was held as to what course should now be pursued, in order to avoid encountering the party which he had observed. It was at length determined to take the cross roads to the east, and, once more passing the Eure, to endeavour to reach the king's camp at Dreux, from the side of Paris.

"We shall have better roads there, sir," said their guide, "and shall run less risk; for the country about Hauteville, Poigny, Epernon, and Maintenon generally holds for the king."

"It will lengthen the way," replied De Montigni; "and I fear for Mademoiselle d'Albret."

"Oh, do not think of me, Louis," exclaimed Rose; "if it is a safer road, it will seem to me a shorter one."

"Besides, Monsieur le Baron," rejoined the guide, "we can rest as long as we like at Nogent Leroy, for it has always been loyal; and, though little more than a village, it defended itself against the Chevalier d'Aumale and three hundred of the League. We can reach it in less than two hours."

"Then let us thither with all speed," answered De Montigni; "for there we shall find safety and repose combined, dear Rose."

This plan was accordingly followed; and, in less than the time mentioned, Nogent Leroy was reached, without any further peril or impediment. Though, as the guide had described it, the place was in fact but a village, yet gates and freshly erected barricades gave it at that time the air of a town; and the marks of musket-balls, in the wood-work of the palisade, showed that it had been fiercely attacked and had made a gallant resistance. The little party was stopped for a moment at the barriers, but the white scarfs worn by De Montigni's men, and the answer of "Vive le Roi!" to the "Qui vive?" of the guard, soon obtained them admission; and, riding on down the street, they reached a small but

clean and neat-looking inn, over the door of which was written the usual inscription, "Lodging for man and horse."

The host came out to meet them, showed them into a room strewn with rushes, called forth his wife in eager and imperative tones to wait upon the lady, and began in the same breath to ask tidings of his guests, and to communicate all the information which he himself possessed. The intelligence he afforded indeed was much more important than any that De Montigni could supply in return; for the very first news he gave imported that a battle might be expected every hour, that the two armies must be within a few leagues of each other, and that parties of Leaguers and Royalists were hurrying up from every quarter to swell the ranks of Mayenne and the king.

These tidings somewhat startled Montigni and his fair companion; but the host, who was an eager Royalist, spoke so confidently of the certain defeat of the League and the triumph of the king, that the apprehension of fresh dangers and difficulties, which the intelligence had at first produced, soon died away; and De Montigni, turning to her he loved as soon as they were alone, pressed her hand in his, saying, "God send the king good success, dear Rose: but even if it should be otherwise, which I will not believe, we can but pursue our flight somewhat farther, and the very hurry and confusion of such events will serve to conceal us from the eyes of those we have most cause to fear."

Rose indeed could scarcely view the matter so cheerfully; but she would not show her apprehensions, and only asked what course her lover would pursue, if it should be found that a battle had been fought and lost by the king before they reached his camp.

"That cannot well be, dear Rose," replied De Montigni; "for I trust we shall reach his camp to-night. They say he has raised the siege of Dreux, and is now at Annet. You can take three or four hours' rest here, and yet reach that place before dark. We must do so, if possible; for in case of success we shall then be free from danger: and in case of reverse we shall have the means of judging in what direction to turn our steps. If farther flight should be necessary, which Heaven forbid! I know that my own dear Rose will not hesitate to give me her hand at once, to remove all chance of separation; and I would fain obtain the king's written sanction to our union, to obviate all difficulties, before a battle takes place—the event of which is always doubtful."

He held Rose's hand in his as he spoke; and, though she bent down her eyes under his eager gaze, she gave no sign of hesitation or reluctance. Yet he could not be satisfied without full consent; and he asked, "Shall

it not be so, dear Rose? Will you not be mine at once?"

"I am yours, De Montigni," replied Rose d'Albret in a low tone. "You will never ask ought that is wrong, I am sure; so that I may well promise to grant whatever you do ask. But I hope we shall find the king, and that he will win the day, and then I may be yours openly and happily, and not in flight, and dread, and concealment."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE KING'S CAMP.

It was once more night—dark, solemn, and sad: the country was a wide undulating plain raised high above the course of the river, which might be heard, swelled by the melting of the snows and the heavy rains that had lately fallen, rushing on with a hoarse murmur through its hollow banks. No hedge-rows, as in England, diversified the scene by daylight, or gave, even in the obscurity of night, that appearance of care and culture which always brings with it the idea of comfort. On the contrary, all was bleak, wide, and desolate. The sight lost itself in the dark expanse, except where part of a distant village might be faintly seen by a sort of lurid glare that hung over it, rising in black masses against the sky upon the right, with its tall yet heavy spire towering above the rest, and where, towards the left, an indefinite something, confused and vague, rested upon the horizon, as if the rounded tops of trees bounded the plain in that direction. Such was the scene through which Louis de Montigni travelled slowly with Rose d'Albret on the night of the 15th. She was weary, exhausted, anxious; and he, with his heart sinking on her account, looked forward into the deep and sombre scene before him, seeking some object to give hope of repose and shelter, but finding little to encourage or console.

Suddenly a light flitted along by the side of the village, feeble and small as a glowworm's lamp, but still it raised expectation; and De Montigni said in a low voice, "Surely that must be St. André."

"Perhaps the king may not be there either, Louis," replied Rose in a faint tone: "all these reports may be as false as that he was at Annet. But, whatever be the case, De Montigni, I fear I must stop at the first houses; for, to say truth, I can go no farther."

"I wish we had not quitted Annet, my beloved," exclaimed the young nobleman; "but see, there are more lights. 'Tis this orchard that hid them. Yes, yes! dear

Rose, we are at length coming near the camp."

"Thank God!" replied Rose d'Albret: but she said no more; for with the sense of relief which she experienced at the thought of finding repose even for a night, were mingled manifold doubts and apprehensions regarding the future, as well as all the complicated emotions which might well thrill through a woman's heart, at the idea of presenting herself before the many eyes of a strange court, under such circumstances, and at such a moment.

As they advanced, and turned the low wall of a small farm, a new scene broke upon their sight. The village, which was extensive, stretched away to the right; and, amongst the gardens and orchards, a thousand lights were to be seen, either passing along from one place to another as officers and messengers sped from regiment to regiment, or fixed though flickering in one place, where the soldiery had lighted fires to keep themselves warm during the night and to dry their clothing, wetted by the frequent showers which had diversified the day.

Sounds innumerable, too, met the ear as they came nearer—first a faint noise, then a mingled roar like the rushing of a torrent; and then various noises began to detach themselves from the rest—loud laughter—the merry song—the solemn hymn—the hoarse shout—the word of command—the call of one companion to another—the hammering of the blacksmith's anvil—the groaning of the forge—the clash of steel, as the armourers and farriers plied the busy stroke, repairing arms and shoeing horses, and once or twice the shrill blast of the trumpet.

No challenge was given as they rode on, for the position of the enemy was now exactly ascertained, and surprise was not expected; but one or two of the officers advanced to the side of the road from the neighbouring gardens, and gazed for an instant upon the passing troop, to see if they recognised any friends amongst the new comers, as the light of the watchfire flashed upon their faces.

Notwithstanding fatigue, anxiety, and fear, Rose d'Albret could not but feel the excitement of the scene. Sometimes guarded by palisades, sometimes sheltered by the low walls, sometimes in the open field, they passed innumerable groups of soldiers seated round their fires, and just concluding their evening meal. Marks of toil and strife were on the faces of all, whether of the gay Catholic or the stern and rigid Huguenot; and no glittering coats of arms, no jewels and embroidery were there, nothing but cold grey steel, and buff coats, and caps rusty with long exposure to the rain, and scarred and weather-beaten countenances, on which, however, sat an ex-

pression of confidence and fearless preparation, which is often an omen of success.

Round some of the fires the veterans were telling tales of former wars, and victories long since achieved. At others, one selected for his voice or skill, was singing; and, whether Papist or Protestant, whether his song was the gay ballad of the day, or one of the canticles of the Reformers, it still spoke the fearless expectation of triumph.

At a slow pace, for the weary horses could hardly drag their limbs along, De Montigni and the lady advanced till they reached the entrance of the village; but here a guarded barricade opposed their farther progress; and, as they could not give the word, the soldiers refused them admission.

"I am seeking the king," said the young nobleman; "send hither the officer of the watch as fast as you can; for we are very weary and must have repose."

Even as he spoke, a plain old man, whose dress betokened some rank in the army, approached the barrier, and replied to the last words he had uttered by saying, "Good faith, young gentleman! you will find no lodging in St. André. Two thirds of us are obliged to sleep in the streets. There is not a dog-kennel untenanted."

"It is not for myself, sir, that I care," answered De Montigni, "but for this lady, who in truth can go no farther. At all events, I must see the king, if you will kindly cause him to be informed that the Baron de Montigni is here."

The old officer gazed in the face of Rose d'Albret with a look of inquiry, not rude but compassionate; and after a moment's pause he answered, "I think, Monsieur de Montigni, the king expected you. There was a messenger arrived an hour ago from the Commander De Liancourt, and your name was mentioned, I know; but I am sorry to say his majesty is not now in the village, and may not return for some hours. You will find him about a league hence, placing the artillery. But stay! I will make inquiries: there may be some orders left for you. Here, Jacques, run up to the king's quarters, and tell them that Monsieur de Montigni is here. Ask what his majesty said about him. Ah, my poor young lady, you look tired enough," he continued, as the soldier sped away; "and yet I cannot ask you to alight and repose yourself, for every cottage is filled to the door with soldiery—a rude scene for such as you. I can give you some refreshment, however," he added suddenly, as if the thought had only just struck him. "Here, D'Avesne, D'Avesne! run in and get out some wine. In the pannier behind the door, you will find a bottle of good old burgundy and a horn cup; bring them hither, quick.

There, stand back, good fellows! Did you never see a tired party come in? They do not want your company."

The last words were addressed to three or four idlers who had sauntered up, and, leaning their folded arms upon the barricade, were staring rudely at Rose d'Albret and her companions. They now, however, walked away with a laugh, which made the warm colour come back into poor Rose's cheek, as she felt herself the object of scorn rather than pity. The moment after, the man who had been sent for the wine returned, and after much persuasion from De Montigni she took some, though it tasted hot and burning to her parched lips rather than refreshing. It seemed to revive her a little, however, when she had swallowed it; and she saw that there would be need of all her remaining strength: for the picture which imagination had painted of a royal camp, and of immediate admission to the king's pavilion, and of a brilliant circle of nobles forming his court, had by this time all faded away; and she found sterner realities and more homely, but not less painful annoyances in place.

It was nearly ten minutes before the man sent to the king's quarters returned; and they seemed hours to Rose d'Albret; but when he did come, he turned to his officer, saying, "They are to go to the farm at Mainville; and the king will see Monsieur de Montigni to-morrow morning. He is to wait there without stirring till he hears more."

"But where is Mainville?" asked De Montigni, almost in despair at the idea of poor Rose having to travel farther that night: "if it be distant, we shall never reach it. The lady now, as you see, can hardly sit her horse."

"'Tis half a league, down by the river," answered the old officer: "but stay—we can help the lady. Have out the hand litter on which they brought Jules de Sourdis from Dreux. Get out a party of bearers, Jacques. We will soon manage that for you, young gentleman; and a crown-piece will make the men go willingly. They will serve for guides, too, for in this dark night you would never find it. But, in the meantime, she had better dismount, and rest upon this bench. You seem sadly weary, lady: have you come far?"

"Many leagues," replied Rose, as De Montigni sprang to the ground by her side to lift her from her horse. "I thank you much for your kindness, sir," she continued, still addressing the old officer. "I do not think I could ride another hour to save life itself."

Seated upon a bench by the side of the barricade, which had been opened to give

her admission, with the light of a large watchfire, and two resin torches casting a flickering glare over the figures of the soldiery as they came and went, wearied, exhausted, faint, and sick at heart, Rose d'Albret remained for several minutes with her fair head bent down, and her hand dropping as if powerless by her side. At length, however, a light seemed to come in her dark eyes, a warm and well-pleased smile crossed her lip, and she raised her fair face towards De Montigni, who stood beside her, with a look of renewed hope and satisfaction which he did not comprehend.

The reader too may ask what it was that seemed so suddenly to revive her? what it was that called up that expression of pleasure and relief? It was not that she saw any friendly form. It was not that she heard any well-known voice. The cause was in no external things, but in her own mind. As she sat there, she had felt deeply and bitterly all that was painful in her situation, with lassitude of limb and sickening heart, fears, anxieties, and gloomy anticipations, which every sight, and sound, and circumstance, tended but to increase. Her thoughts and her sensations had been full of all that is sad and depressing, when suddenly, she had asked herself, if she could recall the last eight and forty hours, return to the mansion of her guardian, lay her head on the pillow of luxury and ease, remove afar peril, and difficulty, and terror, and weariness, become the promised wife of Nicholas de Chazoul, and give up Louis de Montigni for ever, would she do it? Her heart answered the question in a moment—no! Whatever she might suffer was light in comparison. All that she had undergone, all that she endured, lost half its weight when she remembered that she was free—that she was with him she loved; and looking up, as I have said, in his face with a heart lightened and grateful, she felt that to share poverty, sorrow, flight, exile, care, with him, would still have joy enough to compensate for all.

De Montigni could not, of course, see what was passing on in her mind; but still there was a look of affection in her eyes which was not to be mistaken, which told him that she was thinking of him, and that she did not regret what she suffered on his account; and, bending down his head, he spoke those words of tenderness and love which well repaid her for her endurance and her sacrifices.

Shortly after the litter was brought forward, with four stout men to bear it. It was apparently a rude and hastily contrived machine, in which some wounded man had been brought from the siege of Dreux, with a little sort of tilt over it to shelter him from the wet; but the lower part, or couch, was

thickly covered with dry hay, over which the old officer cast his cloak; and De Montigni, placing Rose in it, thanked their new friend warmly for his assistance; and, walking by the lady's side, issued forth from the village of St. André, and was soon once more wandering on in the darkness of the night.

The lights were speedily left behind, the glare of the watchfires faded, or were hidden one after the other by the windings of the road; nothing but a faint, reddish streak in the sky showed the position of the village and the camp. The busy sounds of the army too died away into an indistinct hum, like that of a swarm of bees, and then was lost to the ear altogether; while the voice of the swollen Eure, murmuring as it rushed along, was the only noise that broke upon the ear of night.

The way grew narrower and narrower as they went along, so that it was sometimes with difficulty that De Montigni kept by the litter. But yet he would not leave the side of Rose d'Albret, cheering her from time to time by words of affection and of hope, till at length he saw the glistening of the water before him, as they descended the steep hill, on the table land of which, the fields of Dreux and Ivry are situated; and in a moment after, a single light, apparently streaming from the window of some house, showed him that they were approaching a human habitation.

"That is Mainville, sir," said one of the bearers. "Ah, you are well off! for there are comfortable quarters there by the side of the ford: but the king would suffer none of our people to lodge more than a quarter of a league from the field, for fear the enemy should get possession of his ground early in the morning. You late comers sometimes get the best accommodation."

"Is the enemy so near, then?" asked De Montigni.

"Near!" cried the man, "why, we were two hours in presence this afternoon; and everyone thought they would have begun the battle; but none were engaged but the light horse, who had a short fight for the bottom of the valley."

De Montigni mused for the rest of the way; for he loved not to be so near a field of battle without taking part in it; and yet he had no arms but the sword he wore, nor horses in a fit state to bear him through a long day's fight.

A few minutes, however, brought them to the door of the farm-house, where they had to knock for some time before any one appeared to answer them. The first sight of life within, was the head of a man, protruded from a window above, with the faces of two women looking over his shoulder.

"Who's there?" he cried; "is that the king?"

"No, no, Gros Jean!" replied one of the men, who had come with them from St. André. "The king has something else to do than visit you at this hour, even to see your pretty wife," and he added a loud laugh, in which the farmer good-humouredly joined. "Come down, come down, Gros Jean!" he continued; "these are the people his majesty told you he would quarter upon you—two regiments of horse and three companies of infantry."

"Go along, buffoon," said the farmer; "the king never said he would quarter anybody on me, but two or three ladies and gentlemen."

"Well, these are they," replied the soldier; "so come down and open the door, or, on my life, we will break it down. We have got to fight to-morrow, and cannot stand here talking all night. It's the Baron de Montigni, I tell you, and his lady."

"Well, wait a minute," said the farmer, withdrawing his head; and in a few moments they heard bolts and bars removed, and the door was opened. There was still a little doubt and apprehension in the good, round countenance of the jolly farmer; but the sight of the litter, with De Montigni standing beside it, clothed in the common riding costume of the day, speedily took away his fears: and, calling forward his wife and sister to welcome the lady, he showed every sort of alacrity that could be desired in providing for the comfort of his guests.

"Here is a room to sit in," he said, as De Montigni assisted Rose from the litter, and drew her arm through his own, to give her support. "Dear heart, lady, you seem tired enough, and as if you had been wet through too. Take the light, wife, and show the gentle folks the way." Thus saying, he led them on into a good wide room, where he and his farming men were wont to take their meals; and then, opening a door which gave admission to another chamber, he said, "And here's your bedroom, with as comfortable a bed as any in all Normandy."

"I shall keep watch in the hall, my good friend," replied De Montigni; "but Mademoiselle d'Albret will go to repose, I dare say, directly; for that is what she needs more than anything else, if these two ladies will kindly give her their attendance. A bundle or two of straw, thrown down in the corner there, will do for me and my men; but, as there are seven of them, and hungry enough too, I doubt not, by this time, you had better give them some wine and some provision. Whatever I take," he added, in a significant tone, seeing that the farmer was somewhat confounded at the number of his undesired guests, "I will pay for on the spot."

Gros Jean, as the Royalist soldier had called him, scratched his round head for a moment, and then replied, "I thought that you had been man and wife, from the king's message; but, however, as he said ladies, and there seems but one, there is another little room upstairs, and a good bed too, which you had better have, sir."

"No, no," replied De Montigni, "I will stay in the hall, if you will give me some straw. We will be your guard during the darkness, dearest Rose," he added, pressing her hand in his, "so take a cup of warm milk, if it can be procured, and lie down to rest for this night, at least, in peace and security. I must go now to speak to these good fellows without."

"Let me see you again for a moment, Louis, before I sleep," said Rose, gazing in his face with an anxious look; "you will not be long absent?"

"Not five minutes, my beloved," replied De Montigni; and, leaving her with the farmer's wife and sister, he went out to speak with the men who had carried the litter from St. André.

Let not the reader think, with the cold spirit of censure which is so ready at all times to blame everything that is not customary in our own times and in our own country, that there was aught unusual or improper in the invitation which Rose d'Albret had given her lover to visit her in her bedchamber. In those days, though certainly not purer than the present—and bad enough are both—the common reception-room of a lady, especially in Paris, was that in which she slept. Often before she quitted her chamber, too, in England, as well as in France, the beauty of the hour received her train of admirers, in her bed; and every art of coquetry was displayed, to win or increase admiration, as she lay in what was supposed to be the toilette of the night, but which had often cost her and her maids more than one hour of labour to arrange and render becoming. Such was not, indeed, the custom of Rose d'Albret, but still the habits of the country and the period would not have suffered her to feel that she was committing the slightest impropriety in admitting her lover to her room, even after she had retired to rest, nor would she have doubted the safety of her honour in the hands of De Montigni, under any circumstances of opportunity, or, of temptation. She knew him well, with that knowledge of the heart which perhaps can only be acquired by the intimacy of early youth, and she was certain that nothing on earth would induce him to blemish the being he loved, were there no eye but that of God to witness his actions.

The first task of De Montigni, when he had found the men who accompanied him

thither, was to reward them fully for the trouble that they had taken. They had already removed the litter into the road; and, after having given his own attendants orders to carry in the little baggage they had brought, he drew the chief of the litter-bearers aside, and questioned him eagerly as to the hour at which the battle was expected to take place on the following day.

"Not before noon," replied the man, "for the duke and his people have retreated beyond Ivry, we hear; and that's a two leagues' march."

"Then I may have time to get horses and arms," said De Montigni joyfully. "I must not be so near, my friend, without having some share in this matter. Here is another crown for you, and if you can send me down an armourer, and some of those men who generally follow camps with horses for sale, they may find a good market."

"What arms do you want, Monsieur le Baron?" asked the soldier; "you will not find them easily. One might get a casque and a cuirass for yourself, with pistols, and such things, but I doubt your obtaining much more."

"I must take what can be found," answered De Montigni. "I would fain, indeed, arm my men, likewise; but, at all events, I will be present myself, if I go in my pourpoint."

"A dangerous trick that, Monsieur de Montigni," said a voicenear, which the young nobleman thought he recognised; "but you must not try that experiment. His majesty monopolizes all such follies as that, and suffers no one to fight in their pourpoints but himself."

"Ha! Monsieur de Chasseron," said De Montigni, "is that you?"

"It is, indeed," replied Chasseron. "I am here before you, you see; and I will get you arms, if you want them; but in the meantime you must do me a service. Take up the litter, good fellow, and away," he continued, turning abruptly to the man who had been speaking with De Montigni; "I will see to what this young gentleman wants. No answer, but away. Now, Monsieur le Baron—So you have arrived safe; you have brought the lady with you, I suppose, by seeing the litter."

"I have," answered De Montigni; "but she is well-nigh dead from fatigue."

"'Tis a long way," said Chasseron; "but when I gave the advice, the king was at Dreux, some seven leagues nearer."

"Even now," answered De Montigni, "I have not been able to see his majesty."

"What, he is absent?" said Chasseron; "ay, he is always running about. Parbleu! I fear the enemy will catch him some day, if he does not get wiser with years. However, you remain quiet where you are to

night; the king shall have notice of your being here, for I have a few friends at the court, and you shall hear from him to-morrow; in the meantime, I will procure you what arms you need, though, good faith, you must pay for them yourself, for I have spent all my money in his majesty's service, and have scarcely a cross left in my purse."

"That I am quite prepared to do," replied De Montigni; "but I could have much wished to have seen the king to-night."

"That is impossible," cried Chasseron, in his usual rapid manner. "But what do you want with him? I will get Monsieur de Biron to ask it for you; he will see none but his generals after his return."

"I much wished," replied the young nobleman, in a lower tone, "to obtain his majesty's written sanction to my marriage with Mademoiselle d'Albret; but, of course, he will need long explanations and proof of the contract between her father and my uncle."

"Oh, I know not that," replied Chasseron; "he will be glad enough to give her to a Royalist, rather than a Leaguer. At all events, we will try for you. It's as well that, while you are thus wandering about together, you should have the holy bond of matrimony round your necks, if you must needs poke your heads into it; and who can tell what to-morrow may bring forth? God's purposes are dark and wonderful," he continued, in a more solemn tone. "We none of us know what is good for ourselves or others. It may please Him, Most High, still further to chastise this poor land of France; and even the king himself, for aught we know, if raised by a great victory, might forget his former character, and prove a scourge, instead of a blessing."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed De Montigni, vehemently, "never believe it. More than forty years of noble and upright dealing with all men, of love for his people, of generous forbearance, and high-hearted kindness, may well be warrant to the most suspicious for his conduct in time to come. Do not suspect him, Monsieur de Chasseron."

"I do not," replied the other, laying his hand emphatically on the young man's arm; "but I say still, God only knows what is good and what is evil for the land of France; and He it is who must decide the fate of all to-morrow. However," he continued, "it is well you should be prepared, and we will make the trial for you, whether it succeeds or not. Good-night; I must hasten back, for I have much to do."

He turned away as he spoke; but De Montigni stopped him, saying, "There was some service you said I could render you."

"Ay, parbleu! I had forgot," replied Chasseron. "There is a young lady, Mon-

sieur de Montigni, who has been ill treated and injured by those who ought to have protected her. She is here, in the midst of the camp; and though, to say truth, I know little of her, yet I am sure she deserves not all that has fallen upon her. She has applied to me for protection and assistance, but I am in no condition to give her what she seeks, effectually. Were I to send her to the village, ill tongues might fall upon us both unreasonably. There is no woman in the camp but your fair lady here, and love makes a man kind-hearted towards others of the sex that has enthralled him. If then you would give this girl protection, and aid, in case of need, I should feel grateful, and you would do a good act towards one who, God help her, has few to take her part. From injury I could protect her; from insult and grief, it would need much time and attention, to defend her, were she to take up her dwelling in the camp; and though woman may cling to man as her support and stay, she has no true companionship but with woman. Will you then beseech your sweet lady love to befriend her, and let her pass the night in the farm?"

"Willingly," replied De Montigni; "but where is she?"

"Oh, at a cottage hard by, above," answered Chasseron; "she has been there since last night; when we had a rougher journey than even you have had. I will send her down immediately by some of my men, who are there at the top of the hill. So once more good-night, and God speed us all to-morrow."

Thus saying he turned away, and De Montigni trod back his steps to the farm, musing over the request that had been made, and the promise he had given. It was not that he doubted, it was not that he entertained suspicions; his mind was too clear and free from that fatal experience, which mingled the dark drop with the brightest cup of life, to entertain one injurious thought; but the responsibility, the care that already rested upon him, was enough to weigh him down. His anxiety for her he loved, his longing desire to remain with her, never to leave her, till she was placed in security, contending with his strong and overpowering desire to be present at the struggle which was approaching, surrounded him with difficulties enough; and now they were to be increased by the presence of a third, placed under his protection for the time, and demanding from any one of kindly and courteous feeling equal care and attention. He could have wished it otherwise; but still he felt that he could not have refused, and he hastened back into the house to tell Rose d'Albret of what had occurred, and to ask her countenance and sympathy for the stranger.

De Montigni found his men already in possession of the hall, with the good farmer busily employed in placing food and drink before them, encouraged to produce the best of his store by his young guest's liberality towards the bearers of the litter; for nothing flies so fast as the report of a generous spirit. He passed through them, without notice, however, and knocking at the door of Mademoiselle d'Albret's chamber, was at once admitted by the farmer's sister. De Montigni's tale was soon told; and notwithstanding her weariness, Rose listened with all that tender interest, which the heart of a kind and gentle woman, unhardened by either the vicissitudes, or the vices of the great world, is sure to feel in the misfortunes of a sister.

"Oh, bring her hither whenever she comes," exclaimed the lady, as soon as he had done. "Poor thing, she has suffered as well as we have, and perhaps far more severely, Louis. I will keep my eyes open till I see her, though they are heavy; but if I should be asleep, you must wake me, De Montigni. Promise me that you will."

"If you wish it, dear one," replied her lover; "but these good people will, I am sure, show her every kindness."

"No, no," answered Rose d'Albret, "I would not have her find a cold reception for the world. Oh, De Montigni, what would I have given, as we stood before the barrier at St. André, to have met a woman to speak kindly to me, and tell me to take comfort?"

"Well, then, I will wake you, sweet, kind girl," said De Montigni; "but I do not think she will be long; for Chasseron said she was hard by."

Perhaps the lover would fain have lingered beside his fair promised bride; but after a few more words he withdrew into the hall, and conversed for a short time with the people who had accompanied him from Marzay. Scarcely five minutes passed ere the farmer, who had remained with them, was summoned to the door, and returned the moment after, with a fair and beautiful girl in her first youth, who gazed wildly round upon the strange faces as she entered. De Montigni, however, instantly advanced towards her, and took her by the hand, saying, "Do not be alarmed. We are all friends."

"Friends?" said the poor girl, "friends?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the young nobleman; "but come with me, there is a lady in the next room, waiting anxiously to see you;" and he led her on to the door. The good farmer's sister was still in the room of Mademoiselle d'Albret; but Rose had by this time sought her couch, though she had not yet fallen asleep; and when De Montigni and his fair companion were admitted, she raised herself upon her arm and gazed at the stranger for an instant, shading her eyes

with her hand. The next moment, with a look of utter astonishment, she exclaimed, "Helen!—Helen de la Tremblade! Good heaven, dear Helen, can it be you?"

The poor girl paused, trembled, wavered for a moment, as if she would fain have retreated from the room; but then, running forward, she cast herself upon her knees by the side of Rose's bed, and burying her face in the clothes, seemed to sob convulsively. Rose d'Albret cast her arm round her tenderly; and De Montigni, seeing that there were deeper sorrows in their fair visitor's bosom than he had imagined, withdrew from the room and closed the door. The farmer's sister followed in a few minutes, and Helen de la Tremblade was left alone with Rose d'Albret.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TAKEN CAPTIVE.

THE morning was bright and beautiful; the heavy clouds of the preceding days had passed away, leaving behind them nothing but a few thin fleecy remnants, that were whirled over the blue sky from time to time by the quick wind. It was a true spring day that dawned, genial and soft; and, in the clump of trees by which one side of the farmhouse was shaded, the early birds were singing sweetly, rejoicing in the blessings of God and the return of the bright season to the earth.

De Montigni had watched the greater part of the night, and had not closed his eyes till an hour before the break of day; but he then fell into a heavy and profound slumber, which even the various noises of the farm, the rising of his own attendants, the coming and going of the farmer and his family, and the arrival of several people from the village, bringing intelligence of the movements of the army, did not disturb. He lay so calm and still, his servants would not wake him, till at length a messenger from the king spurred quickly down to the farm-house, delivered a sealed packet, addressed to the young baron, and rode back again without a moment's pause. It was then thought fit to rouse him; and, starting up, as one of his followers shook him by the arm, he passed his hand across his brow, exclaiming, "Good Heaven! it was a dream!" Then taking the packet he opened it, and found a few brief words in the handwriting of the king.

"MONSIEUR DE MONTIGNI," so the letter ran, "I am informed of your arrival, and also that your uncle, the Commander de

Liancourt, will be here before ten o'clock with a small corps. He has orders to join you at Mainville. Wait for his arrival, then come up by the road to St. André as far as the first turning, which will lead you to the plain. There, as soon as you reach the army, fall into the light horse of the Count d'Auvergne.

"I enclose you the paper which you requested by message last night.

"Your very best friend,

"HENRY."

There was a small slip of paper enclosed in the letter; and to it De Montigni now turned, reading, with joy and satisfaction, the following words:—

"Henry, by the grace of God, King of France and Navarre. It having been certified to us, upon good and sufficient authority, that, by contract existing between the late Francis d'Albret, Count de Marennnes, our well-beloved cousin, and Anthony, Count of Liancourt, the hand of the only daughter of the said Francis d'Albret was plighted, promised, and engaged to Louis, Baron de Montigni, and that the said parties are now of an age, and willing to fulfil the said contract, We do by these presents authorise the said parties, to proceed to the celebration of their marriage, notwithstanding any let, hindrance, or protest, on the part of any person or persons, whatsoever, consenting to ratifying and sanctioning the said marriage, by the power and authority in us being.

(Signed)

(And lower down)

"HENRY."

"REVOL."

"Is Mademoiselle d'Albret awake?" asked De Montigni, eager to show the precious document to her he loved.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the man to whom he spoke; "she is awake and up an hour ago; but she bade us not disturb you."

De Montigni hastened to the door and knocked. "Come in," said the sweet voice of Rose d'Albret; and entering, he found her sitting with her hands clasped in that of Helen de la Tremblade, who had passed the night with her. She rose to meet him, and was immediately pressed to his heart, while he whispered in her ear, "You are mine, dear Rose. Here is all that was wanting to our immediate union," and he placed the paper in her hand.

There was not less light in the eyes of Rose d'Albret than in those of her lover, as she read the king's sanction to their marriage; but when she turned to the letter that accompanied it, her cheek grew pale, and a tear trembled upon her eyelids.

"Oh, Louis! must you leave me so soon?" she cried, "and to battle?"

"Nay, dearest Rose," answered De Montigni, "you would not have me avoid the path to honour and renown."

"No, Louis, no," she answered; "I will not say another word. Ten o'clock? That is very soon; 'tis past nine now."

"Indeed!" said De Montigni. "I have slept too long."

"Oh, no!" answered Rose. "I came and looked at you as you lay, and it would have been cruel to rouse you from so calm a slumber."

"And yet I dreamed sad dreams, dear Rose," said her lover. "But what is to be done?" he continued; "neither arms nor horses have arrived, and our poor beasts are jaded with yesterday's fatigue."

"But you cannot go without arms," said Rose, rejoicing in the hope that something might detain him from the perilous field; "your uncle will never let you go unarmed. Perhaps they will come soon; but in the meantime take some refreshment, Louis. Run, dear Helen, run and tell them to bring him some food."

Helen de la Tremblade had remained sitting at the table, with her hand covering her eyes; but now, rising, she approached the door, pausing, however, with a glowing cheek, ere she went, to whisper something to Rose d'Albret.

"Not for the world!" replied Rose; "oh, no, Helen, do not suppose it," and her cheek, too, grew red.

The breakfast was soon brought, and Louis de Montigni ate a few hasty mouthfuls; but he was too much excited and too anxious to find any long repose. More than once he rose and looked out; more than once he questioned the farmer as to whether no one had come during the morning to furnish him with arms. He asked eagerly, too, for intelligence from St. André, and heard, with feelings of impatience and pain, that the king had marched at an early hour to take up his position on the ground he had chosen for his field of battle. He then sent out two of his men to gain further information, and to see if any horses could be procured; but minute after minute passed by; the hour of ten arrived; and every moment he expected to see the old commander and his party at the ford before the farm-house, before anything that he required could be obtained. The men brought back word that the village was nearly deserted, except by a few sick and wounded; but they had seen the army of the king, they said, extending in a long line across the plain, and they thought they had also perceived the heads of Mayenne's columns advancing from the side of Ivry.

"Well, we must go as we are," said De Montigni; "we fought the other day at

Marzay without a scratch; and we shall ride lighter without armour. Have everything ready to set out the moment my uncle appears. Two of you, however, must stay with these ladies. You are all anxious to go, I know, so choose by lot, and make haste, that all may be ready."

The moments that thus passed were sad and terrible to poor Rose d'Albret. She would not say a word to stay him; and yet she would have given worlds, had it been possible without damage to his honour, to have withheld him from the field. Each order that he gave, each inquiry that he made, roused fresh fears and apprehensions in her breast; and the words of tenderness and affection with which he strove to cheer her, but rendered her more sad, while again and again she asked herself, if she should ever hear that voice again.

Nor were the feelings of Helen de la Tremblade less painful, though perhaps they were less anxious, as, seated near the window, she gazed forth in sad and motionless meditation. To those who stood beside her, all was risked upon that battle; but to her, the bright hopes of life, which in their case were but chequered with fears that an hour might sweep away, were gone for ever. Their words of love, their anxiety for each other, all awoke painful thoughts and bitter memories; and over all her contemplations, spread the dark cloud of self-reproach, leaving not one bright spot in the future or the past.

Still minute after minute passed away, and no one appeared. The impatience of De Montigni became extreme. "The battle will begin," he thought, "and I shall be absent. Disgrace and shame will fall upon me. Who will know of the king's commands; and men will say I was within half a league of a stricken field, and kept aloof. I cannot bear this much longer. Ride out upon the top of the hill, Victor, towards the side of Annet, and see if you can perceive my uncle coming. But hark! what is that?"

As he spoke the loud boom of a distant cannon struck upon the ear; another and another succeeded, and then several shots still farther off were heard replying to the former.

"It is begun," he said; "I can wait no more. Bring round my horse! Dearest Rose, I must go to see what is taking place. I will be back soon, my beloved," and he once more pressed her to his heart.

"But the king's commands," said Rose; "he told you to wait here for your uncle. You ought not to go indeed, Louis."

"There must be some mistake," he answered, "and I cannot stay here like a coward or a fool, while my king is fighting for his crown, and the fate of France is in the balance. I will be back speedily—I will

but see," and tearing himself away, he sprang upon his horse's back, followed by those upon whom the lot to accompany him had fallen, and spurred up the hill at full speed. On the top he paused, looking towards Annet. The whole country was open before his sight; but no body of men was to be seen, and hesitating no longer, he rode on till the plain of Ivry lay before his eyes, covered with squadrons and battalions of horse and foot, and presenting the wild, confused and busy scene of a field of battle.

When he was gone, Rose d'Albret covered her eyes and for a few moments gave way to tears; but Helen de la Tremblade came round to where she stood, and laid her hand timidly upon her arm. Rose dashed away the drops from her eyes, at this mute appeal, saying, "No, Helen, no; I will not doubt it! It were wicked, it were wrong, to think that God would so abandon us."

"Besides, lady," said Helen, "Monsieur de Montigni is good and noble; you are virtuous and wise. Can such people ever be unhappy?"

"Ah, my poor Helen," replied Rose d'Albret, "you reproach yourself too bitterly when the fault was his. Shamefully have you been used; and though God forbid that I should say you have not done wrong, yet I can well believe that, with such vows and promises, you fancied yourself his wife as much as if the priest had joined your hands. Perhaps," she added, in her ignorance of man's nature, "perhaps, now that he has lost the hope of obtaining my estates, which was all he sought, he may make you his wife indeed, and deliver you from self-reproach."

"That he can never do," replied Helen de la Tremblade; "I feel that I am a degraded being, lady, unworthy even of your kindness."

"Nay, do not call me lady," answered Mademoiselle d'Albret; "you used to call me Rose, Helen, and you must do so still. But indeed, dear Helen," she continued, willing to pass away heavy time with any other thoughts but those of what was taking place so near her, "but indeed, I will trust you may still be happy; and one thing you must do for my sake, you must tell your uncle all. He will give you absolution for the past, and direction for the future."

"Ere this, he has been told," answered Helen, "told by that harsh and cruel woman. She would never spare me that."

"Ay, but you know not how she may have told it," answered Rose d'Albret. "Oh, she is false and deceitful, Helen, and may have cast the whole blame and shame on you, when, in truth, yours is but the lighter share. See him, dear Helen, see him, and let him know the whole. Shrink not from his re-

proaches; hear them with patience and humility; but let him know the plain truth, just as you have told it me; and he will forgive you, I am sure. Hark! there are the cannon again. Oh God, protect him—Helen, I will go and pray."

"May I pray with you?" asked Helen de la Tremblade timidly.

"Come," said Rose, taking her by the hand, "come, let us raise our voice to Him from whom all need, and all are sure to receive, forgiveness and mercy if they seek it."

An hour passed by in anxious expectation. Oh, how long an hour may be to those who watch, to those who, with the faint sickening of the heart, know that upon its events may hang the long misery of a hopeless, cheerless, loveless life! It seemed as if it would never go; and every device they used to make it speed the faster, seemed like the ticking of a clock, marking the slowness of time's progress, not accelerating its flight. Now they spoke of things past, hoping to lose retrospection, the sense of things present; now they talked of the future, the wide indefinite blank, which to all men is a chasm that the eye searches in vain. But still to the present, the overburdened present, their minds and their words returned whether they would or not. To the quick imagination of Rose d'Albret, all the horrors of the battle-field presented themselves in more than even their real terrors. She pictured the dead, the dying, and the wounded; the fierce contention, the sanguinary triumph, the unsparing cruelty, loss, flight, defeat; and though she laboured zealously with her own mind to lead it to other themes, yet it was all in vain. She might speak of anything, of everything but the battle, yet still her thoughts wandered back to that overwhelming image, which, like some vaster mountain in a hilly country, was ever seen towering over all the rest, and presenting itself to contemplation, whenever the eyes were turned from other objects.

Sometimes she would strive to speak calmly with Helen de la Tremblade, upon what should be the poor girl's future conduct. Sometimes she would inquire gently and tenderly into the past. But ever her mind would come back again to the battle, and she would give way to all the apprehension and anxiety she felt; would ask how the time went; would call the good farmer, and demand intelligence; would send out one of the attendants, to bring her any news that he could gather.

Half an hour more flew slowly away, and De Montigni did not return; but then, quick spurring down the road, as if for life, came a small party of horse. The farmer, who was upon the watch, suddenly closed and barred the doors, and Rose saw from the

window that, over their dusty armour, they wore scarfs of green, a sign that they belonged to the faction of the League. The worthy countryman called her and her companion quickly from the lower storey, put up the strong oaken shutters, and bade them, if they needs must gaze, look from the rooms above. But the cavaliers paused not even to notice the house as they passed, and, hurrying on, plunged their horses into the stream, and gained the other side.

"Surely the king has won the day?" said Rose; turning to the farmer, "the Leaguers fly. Is it not so?"

"I know not, mademoiselle," replied the peasant. "It often happens in strifes like these that men run away before the battle is lost or won. Their own corps may be defeated; but there may come many more to turn the fight."

Even while he spoke a single horseman, with a scarf of white, rode down more slowly on a wounded horse, looked up to the window, where they stood, and cried aloud, "The king is killed," passing on without further pause.

The heart of Rose d'Albret sank as she caught his words; but she grew fainter still when she beheld upon the road, a party of four, one on foot, leading a horse, on which sat a wounded man, with two others supporting him. For an instant she fancied—for the imagination of fear is as vivid and as false as that of hope—that she recognised the figure of De Montigni. The next moment, however, she saw that it was an older and a heavier man, clothed in armour, and with the visor of his casque closed; but with the white signal of the Bourbon party thrown over his shoulder.

"Oh, let us go and help him," she cried.

The farmer hesitated. "Do, do!" cried his wife.

"Well, quick, then!" said the man, and hurrying down, the door was unbarred and opened; but still he held it in his hand ready to close it in an instant, if he saw others following.

"What news? what news?" cried the peasant as the others came near.

"Victory! victory!" shouted one of the men: "Mayenne in full flight and total rout!"

"And the king? and the king?" demanded the farmer.

"Master of the field; and following them like a thunderbolt, to Ivry," was the reply of one of those who rode beside the wounded man; "but help us, here," he added; "he is sadly hurt."

They lifted their master from his horse at the gate, and were bearing him in, while Rose d'Albret, who had come forth with the farmer and his wife, gazed on him with

looks of sympathy, when, suddenly, at full speed, but waving joyfully his hat and plume, De Montigni appeared upon the road above, followed by an attendant; and giving way to all she felt in that moment of exceeding happiness, she ran on to meet him, and in an instant was in his arms.

"Oh, this has been a glorious day, dear Rose," he cried; "and the crown of France is firm upon our monarch's brow. By his own right hand he has won it; and God grant him life to wear it long."

Tears were the only reply that Rose could make; but the good farmer tossed up his hat, and cried, "Hurrah!"

"Whom have you here?" asked De Montigni, as his eyes fell upon the group just arrived, who were now entering the farm, with the wounded man borne in the midst. But, ere any one could answer, coming up the road from the other side, as if seeking a ford across the stream, were seen a body of some thirty horse, with a young and graceful man at their head. The farmhouse hid them from the young baron and the lady till they had passed the angle; but then the green scarfs mingled with black, too plainly showed to what party they belonged. They rode fast, but not at the headlong speed of fear; and, when they saw the marks of a ford, the leader paused, marshalled his men to pass two and two, and then looked round him with a calm, deliberate air. His eyes instantly lighted upon De Montigni, his attendant and Rose d'Albret, for the farmer had retreated into the house; and, exclaiming "Halt!" to those who were passing the ford, the officer of the League spoke another word or two to a gentleman near him.

De Montigni drew Rose rapidly to the door of the farm, and pushed it violently with his hand; for by this time it was closed, and the good farmer, seeing the arrival of the troop, had barred and bolted it as before. In vain De Montigni looked about for a place of refuge: they were shut in between the bank, the wall of the garden, and the ford; and in an instant they were surrounded by the horsemen.

"Ha, ha! we shall not go without some prisoners at least," cried the leader of the troop; "your sword, sir, your sword—it is vain contending."

De Montigni hesitated; but he was seized in a moment; and while Rose clung in agony to his breast, his sword was snatched from his side, and a pistol levelled at his head.

"Surrender or die!" cried a fierce-looking man, who had sprung to the ground beside him. "We have no time to waste upon Huguenots."

"We are no Huguenots," replied De Montigni, "but faithful Catholics, though

servants of the king. I surrender, as it needs must be so; but, of course, you will let this lady retire into the house—you do not make war upon women, I suppose."

"That depends upon circumstances," replied the leader, who had now come up. "Your name, sir?"

"The Baron de Montigni," replied the young nobleman.

"We are in luck," exclaimed the leader, turning to one of his companions; "then this fair lady is Mademoiselle d'Albret?"

Rose only replied by her tears; and the leader continued, turning to De Montigni, "Mount your horse, sir, and follow! You are a prisoner of war, and shall be treated as such. The lady shall be restored to those from whose care you took her. No words; for time is short. Have you a litter or a horse for the lady?"

"Her jennet is in the stable," replied De Montigni; "but she is too much fatigued and weary to ride. If you have the spirit of a gentleman and a knight, as you seem to be, you will not force her to do so."

"Weary or not weary," said the stranger, "she must come along. Quick, bring out the jennet! Lose not a minute, or we shall have some of the enemy upon us. Lady, it seems your friends have kindly shut the door in your face, so that if you have goods and chattels within, they must even remain where they are."

"You are discourteous, sir," said De Montigni, "and abuse your advantage."

"How now!" cried the leader, grasping his sword; but Rose held up her hand in entreaty, exclaiming, "Nay, nay, De Montigni, say not a word—I am ready to go. I trust this gentleman will use no needless harshness. Here is the jennet: I will go directly."

The horseman looked down somewhat gloomily, murmuring, "Discourteous! such a term was never used to Nemours before."

"Monsieur de Nemours," replied De Montigni, "I am free to say I believe it never was; and I am sure, now I know you, it never was deserved. You have lost a great battle, sir, and some irritation may be forgiven: but I beseech you, if it must be shown, let it fall upon my head, and not upon this lady's."

"Fear not," said the duke, turning to him frankly; "I must send her to her guardian, as I have been required; but she shall be treated with all kindness by the way; and in the meantime," he added aloud, "she is under the protection of my honour. Quick, quick!" he continued, "see, there are people coming down already. Stand to your arms, there. Mount, sir, mount."

Before De Montigni did so, however, he lifted Rose into the saddle, and then sprang

upon his horse, saying, "I will not detain you, my lord duke; but you need not fear," he added, "those are but two or three of my own servants."

"On!" cried Nemours to his soldiers; "steady through the ford."

"Which way, my lord?" asked the guidon of the party.

"Towards Chartres," answered the duke, and the troop took their way across the stream.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEATH OF THE COMMANDER.

THE sight of pain and suffering, to which man's heart—even if it do not become totally hard and obtuse by his own dealings with the rough things of the world—grows less sensible every day as he advances in life, is always matter of painful interest to woman. There is something in her bosom that tells her it is her own destiny to suffer. There are fine links of sympathy that bind her affections to the sufferer, and not alone the general tenderness of her nature, to which such feelings are commonly altogether ascribed. The words of a woman's compassion are always different from those of a man's; they show that she brings the pain she witnesses more home to her own heart. Man may grieve for another's anguish; she sympathises with it; man feels for the man, she actually shares his pain.

Helen de la Tremblade remained in the lower storey of the house, even after the shutters had been put up and the door closed by the farmer, when the first party of fugitive Leaguers passed by. She took little note of anything that followed, but sat meditating over her own fate, with her head leaning on her hand, till the sound of a groan struck her; but then starting up at once, she advanced towards the door of the room, which led into a wide, long passage. There she found four stout soldiers bearing in a wounded man; and though she could not see his face, from his visor being down, the languid attitude in which he lay, as his men carried him in their arms, showed her clearly that he had received some terrible injuries. Self was forgotten in a moment; her own sorrows, her own wrongs, the bitter regrets of the past, the desolate despair of the future, were all swept away for the time, and, clasping her hands, she exclaimed, "Alas! alas! he is dying, I fear. Bring him hither, bring him hither," she continued; "there is a bed in this room," and she led the way through the hall to the chamber,

where she and Rose d'Albret had passed the preceding night.

Carrying him slowly forward, the soldiers laid the wounded man, still in his dented and dusty arms, upon the couch, and instantly began to unfasten his cuirass, through which a small hole, as if pierced by the shot of an arquebuse, might be seen, stained at the edge with blood; but he waved his hand saying, in a faint voice, "The casque, the casque! take off the casque! Where is my nephew? Where is Louis? He should be here."

"Ah," cried Helen de la Tremblade, "he went out to the battle not an hour ago. Perhaps he too is wounded or dead."

"Mad-headed boy!" cried the old commander as they removed his casque, "he had no arms! Why did they let him go? Ha! Is not that Helen, the priest's niece?"

"Yes," replied Helen, approaching timidly and taking his hand, "it is poor Helen de la Tremblade."

"Ay, I remember," said the old commander, "but where is Rose? Where is Rose d'Albret? She was with my nephew Louis."

"Oh, she is without here," cried Helen, "I will call her directly;" and away she ran through the hall into the passage, and to the door. But she found it barred and bolted, and the farmer bending down, with his ear to the keyhole, striving to catch the sounds without.

"Where is Mademoiselle d'Albret?" asked Helen.

"Hush," he cried sternly, waving her back with his hand, and still listening to the door. Helen listened too, but she could hear nothing but the indistinct murmur of several voices speaking, mixed with the sound of horses' feet trampling and stamping, as if brought to an unwilling halt; but a moment or two after, someone spoke in a still louder tone, crying, "To Chartres!" and then came the noise of a party moving off, and the plashing sound of cavalry marching through the ford.

"Where is Mademoiselle d'Albret?" repeated Helen, as the farmer raised his head from the keyhole.

"Good faith, I cannot tell," replied he; "run up, wife, run up to the room above! and see what is going on without."

The farmer's wife did as he bade her, and the next instant her feet were heard overhead coming back from the window to the top of the stairs. "Ah, heaven!" she cried in a loud voice, "they have carried off the young lady, and Monsieur de Montigni, and his servant, and all. You should not have shut the door, Jean. You are a cruel, hard-hearted man. I heard them push it myself to get in; and now they are prisoners; and no one can tell what will happen."

"Hold your tongue! You are a fool, wife," answered the farmer angrily. "Do you think I was going to leave the house open for the Leaguers to come in? We should have had the place pillaged, and all our throats cut."

But the woman's tongue, as is sometimes the case with that peculiar organ in the female head, was not to be silenced easily, and she continued to abuse her husband, for excluding poor Rose d'Albret and her lover, in no very measured terms, while Helen de la Tremblade, sad and sorrowful, returned to the bedside of the old commander to communicate the painful intelligence she had just received.

"Where is Rose?" demanded the old officer, as soon as he saw her; "why does she not come?"

"Alas!" replied Helen, "a party of the League, just now sweeping by, have taken her away with them."

The old man, who by this time had been stripped of his arms, and laid in the bed, raised himself suddenly, and gazed in her face with a look of grief and consternation. Then sinking back upon the pillow again, he closed his eyes, but said not a word for several minutes. At length one of his attendants coming forward, inquired, if he had not better ride away to St. André and seek for a surgeon.

"No," replied the old commander, abruptly, "'tis no use. This is my last field, Marlot, and the sooner I go the better. I am fit for nothing now. I could scarce sit my horse in the battle, though I did drive my sword through that fellow on Aumale's right hand. But it's all over; and I shall soon go too. No use of being tortured by the surgeons. I've had enough of them. No; but I will tell you what you shall do. Go and seek for Louis; though that is most likely vain, also. Why the fiend did he go to the field without arms? Yet, *Ventre Saint Gris!* I love the boy for it, too. But he never can have escaped from that *mêlée*. He is dead, so there is nothing worth living for."

Helen had refrained hitherto from telling him that his nephew was in captivity, as well as Rose d'Albret, for fear of weighing him down, in his weak state, under the load of misfortune; but now, seeing that his apprehensions for his nephew's fate had a more terrible effect than even the reality could produce, she said, "No, sir, he is not dead. They have carried him away too, with Mademoiselle d'Albret!"

"Ha! girl, ha! Are you not lying?" demanded the wounded man.

"No, indeed," replied Helen, "it is the truth. The farmer's wife saw them a moment ago."

"Well, then, seek a surgeon," said the old man; "I will try to live, though it is idle, I think. Look for Estoc, too. Where saw you him last?"

"He was in full pursuit with the Grand Prior, sir," answered one of the men.

"I saw him take the red standard of the Count of Mansveldt," replied another.

"That's well, that's well," said the old commander, "take means to let him know where I lie. Then bring a surgeon if you will. They shall do with me what they like. Will you be my nurse, little Helen?" he continued, extending his hand towards her.

"That I will, if I may," replied Helen, kneeling by the bedside and kissing the large bony hand he had held out.

"Well, get me a cloak or something," said the old man, "to cast over my feet, for I feel very cold. Then come, sit down and talk to me; and you fellows go away and get your dinner. It must be noon by this time."

"'Tis one o'clock, sir," answered one of the men.

"Get your dinner, get your dinner," cried the commander.

"I have no heart to eat, sir," said the one nearest to him, "seeing you lying there."

"Pooh!" exclaimed his master, "did you never see an old man die before? I have seen many; and they will die, whether you eat your dinner or not. Leave this young lady to tend me; dine, and, if you will, say a paternoster for my sake. That's the best you can do to help me, though you are good creatures, too, and love me well, I know—as I love you. But we must all part, and my march is laid out."

The men departed one by one, and Helen remained alone with the old Commander de Liancourt, doing the best she could to tend and serve him. He suffered her to examine his wounds, for the good old chivalrous custom which required that ladies should know something of leech-craft had not yet passed away; but it was one beyond her skill. The ball of an arquebuse or pistol, fired point blank at a short distance, had pierced his chest on the right side, a little more than a hand's breadth below the arm. Some blood had followed the wound, but not much; and all hemorrhage had ceased. He declared that the only pain he felt was a burning sensation near the back.

"That's where the ball lies, Helen," he said. "I wish it had gone through; for these things taking up their lodging in the body, often make the house too hot to hold the proper tenant. However, God's will be done. I never valued life a straw; and now, after having known it sixty years, I certainly do not prize it more for the acquaintance.

'Tis an idle and a bitter world, fair lady, as I fear you have found out by this time."

Helen shrunk and turned pale, as the old man seemed to allude to her situation and his eye rested upon her face, she thought, with a look of meaning. He said no more, however; and in a moment after the farmer entered to offer his services to the wounded man, with whose rank he was now acquainted, and to give him further tidings which had just arrived from the field—how the Swiss and French infantry had surrendered without resistance, and all the standards and cannon had fallen into the hands of the king.

The commander cut him short, however, asking after his nephew, which way they had taken him, how many the party numbered, and many other questions, all of which the man might have answered without betraying the fact that, to his own fears, was in some degree owing the capture of Rose d'Albret and the young Baron de Montigni. We put our armour where we are weak, however; and the first words of the farmer were in his own defence, betraying at once all that had taken place. As the wounded man heard him, and began to comprehend what had passed, his cheek turned fiery red, and raising himself partly in bed, he bent his eyes sternly upon him, and cursed him bitterly, calling him coward, and knave, and telling him he knew not what he had done.

"Fool!" cried the commander; "do you think they would have stayed to plunder your pitiful house with the sword of the king at their heels? Curses upon you, sir! you have delivered a fair sweet lady to the hands of her persecutors, as gallant a gentleman as any in France to his knavish enemies. By the Lord that lives, I have a mind to make my men take thee and drown thee in the river, poltroon!"

The farmer was irritated, as perhaps he might well be; and, but little inclined to bear from another reproaches which he had endured quietly from his wife, he was about to reply in angry terms, when Helen interposed; and, with gentle firmness, which might perhaps not have been expected from the tender and yielding disposition which she had hitherto displayed, she led him from the room, and insisted upon his making no reply.

She then turned all her efforts to calm and soothe the old commander; and so tenderly, so kindly, did she busy herself about him, that the heart of the rough old soldier was moved, and he exclaimed, "Bless thee, my child, thou art a sweet good girl; and I wish I could but live to do thee some service. But it is in vain, Helen, it is all in vain; not that I mind this burning pain; for that more or less follows every wound, but 'tis the sudden

failing of my strength. All power seems gone; and, in an instant, I have become as if I were a child again. I was lame and well-nigh crippled with old wounds before; for I never was in battle or combat but I was sure to receive some injury—such was my ill-luck; but still in my hands and arms I was as strong as ever, could bend double a crown between my thumbs, or break the staff of a lance over my knee. Now it is a labour to me to lift my hand to my head; and that has come all in a moment. This means death; Helen, this means death!”

“Nay, perhaps not,” replied Helen de la Tremblade. “The body is strangely composed; and the ball may rest upon some sinew or some nerve that gives strength; yet all may be well again.”

The old man shook his head, but still he remained cheerful, often talking of death, yet never seeming to look upon it with dread or horror. In about an hour a surgeon arrived, examined and probed the wound, and descanted learnedly upon its nature. But with him, the good old commander showed himself irritable and impatient, writhed under his hand, declared he tortured him, and seemed to shrink more from pain than from death itself. The man of healing soon saw that he could do but little. To Helen’s anxious inquiries, however, he did not give the most sincere answers, leaving her to hope that the wound might be cured, and saying, that he would come again at night. He calculated, indeed, that his patient would live over the next day, and that there would be time enough for a priest to be summoned. That was all that his conscience required; and he judged—perhaps kindly—that it was useless to torment a sick man with the thoughts of death, for many hours before the event took place.

During the whole of the rest of the day, Helen seldom, if ever, quitted the bedside of the Commander de Liancourt. Though careless of life, inured by long habit to suffering, and even somewhat impatient of anything that seemed like forced attention to his state, the old warrior was not at all insensible to real kindness. He saw that she sympathised with him, that she really felt for all he endured, that she did her best to soothe and to allay, to comfort and support him. He could not but see it: for though, ever and anon, the shadow of her own fate would fall upon her again, and she would sit, for a moment or two, in gloom and darkness, yet at his lightest word, at his least movement, she was up and by his bedside. The cup was always ready for his lips, the pillow was constantly smoothed for his head, his wishes seemed anticipated, his very thoughts answered, and even the burning impatience of growing fever could not run before her

promptitude. When he obtained a moment of repose, she was calm and silent. When he wished to speak, she was ready to answer, in sweet and quiet tones that sounded pleasant to his ear; when his breathing became oppressed, she was there to raise his head upon her soft arm, to open the window for the air of spring to enter, and to bathe his fiery brow. To another young and inexperienced being, the scene might have been terrible, the task hard; but to her, it was all a relief. A share in any sorrow was lighter than the full burden of her own; and aught that took her thoughts from herself delivered her from a portion of her anguish.

More than once, the old man gazed upon her fixedly for two or three minutes, as if there was something that he wished to say, and yet did not; more than once, he sent away his followers, who came and went during the afternoon between his room and the next, as if he were about to speak of something that lay at his heart; but still he refrained, till, just as the light was beginning to fade, he turned painfully in the bed, and murmured, “Helen.”

The poor girl was by his side in a moment; and putting forth his now burning hand, he took hers, continuing, “Helen, I wish to talk to you about yourself before I go.”

Helen trembled like an aspen leaf. Four-and-twenty hours before, in the first agony of desolation and despair, she would have poured forth her whole soul to any one who offered her a word of kindness and sympathy; but a change had come over her since then; the power of thought had returned, conscience and shame and remorse had made themselves heard, over even the tumultuous voices of grief and indignation and hopeless agony. The still, but all-pervading words of self-reproach, filled her ear continually; and, in the blank wilderness of existence, she saw but her own folly. She shrank then, and trembled when he spoke of herself. There was no name but one that he could have pronounced, which would have sounded more horrible to her ears than her own.

“Oh, not now, not now!” she cried, drawing back.

But the old man still held her hand in his, which seemed to scorch her; and he went on, “Why not now, Helen? It will soon be too late. The minutes are numbered, my poor girl. The hand upon the dial seems to go slow, but it will soon point to the hour when this fire shall have burned itself out, and nothing but the ashes will remain. I have learned something of your story, Helen, from the people who came with my keen, harsh sister, Jacqueline. Old Estoc heard it, and told it to me; but I would know more—I would know all—”

"Oh, not now, not now!" cried Helen again; and, by a sudden movement of anguish and terror, she drew her hand from him, and, with a gasping sob, ran out of the room.

There was no one in the hall, and when she reached the middle, she paused. "Shall I leave him?" she asked herself; "leave him because he means and speaks kindly—leave him because I cannot bear to hear my own folly breathed—leave him? Oh no!" and with a movement as sudden, but with a downcast eye and burning cheek, she returned, and seated herself near in silence, gazing upon the ground.

"Helen," said the old commander, "I have grieved you. Come hither, and forgive me."

She sprang towards him, and, casting herself on her knees by the bedside, covered her aching eyes with her hands, exclaiming, "Oh, no, no! It is I who need forgiveness; not you. Do not speak so kindly, sir, do not speak so gently; for it goes farther to break my heart than all your sister's harshness."

"Hush, hush!" said the old soldier, "do not move me, there's a good girl. But listen to me, Helen, for I wish you well, and you have been tender and affectionate to me this day, when I have much needed it. I am a rough, old man, Helen, and know not how to speak gently. But I would fain talk to you about yourself, before I depart from this place. Listen to me then, and do not think I mean anything but kindness. I hear that my sister has been hard upon you—driven you out of her house, given you harsh names. Nay, never shake so. She is a bitter woman, Helen, to all faults but her own; and I am sure if you have any, they have been but too much gentleness. Why, I remember you as a little child in your good father's time. There now, you weep! I know not how to speak to you. But never mind, I'll talk no more about yourself. But whatever be your faults, Helen, take my advice. Go to your uncle, tell him all. He will forgive you; for he is a good man at heart, and loves you; and besides—"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Helen, "I cannot go to him, for his look would kill me. Rose, so kind and good, so gentle to the faults of others, she, too, persuaded me to go to him: but you do not know him. He is good and kind, and loves me well, it is true; but he is not forgiving. Besides, how can I go there? How can I see him without meeting—" and she gave a quick shudder, without concluding the sentence.

"Ay," said the wounded man, "that must be thought of. But all this is partly your uncle's own fault, Helen. I warned him when he put you with my sister, that he was

giving his dove to a vulture. I told him it would be your ruin; but none of those people heeded the old soldier. They followed their own plans, and thought plain truth, foolishness. Hark! do you not hear horses? It is good old Estoc, come to see his dying leader."

The next moment, there was a knock at the chamber door, and before any one could say, "Come in," it opened, and the tall, bony figure of Estoc, clothed in armour, such as was worn in that day, but with the head-piece laid aside, appeared striding up with his wide steps to the bedside of the wounded commander.

"How goes it, sir?" he cried, "how goes it?"

"Fast, Estoc, fast!" answered the old knight. "I am glad you have come, for there is much to talk about before I go. Helen, dear child, run away for a while; and take some repose and refreshment, for you have scarcely tasted aught since I have been here. She has been an angel to me, Estoc, like my own child."

"Thank you, mademoiselle, thank you," cried Estoc, taking her hand and kissing it, while she turned away her head, "God will bless you for it!"

The tears rolled over Helen's cheeks; and, saying, "Call me when you want me, sir," she left the room.

For more than an hour the old Commander de Liancourt and Estoc remained together, while Helen, at the window of a room above, sat and gazed out upon the sky, seeing the last rays of light fade away, and the stars look forth one by one. "Ah!" she said to herself, as she watched them, "other lights come in the heavens when the sun sets; but there is none so bright as that which is gone. The moon, too, may rise with her pale beams; but it is still night, shine she ever so brightly."

At length the surgeon arrived and went in again. The next moment he sent for Helen to aid him; but when she entered the old commander's room, she found that he would not suffer his wound to be meddled with.

"It is of no avail, master surgeon," he said; "I know I am dying. You can do no good, and you do but torture me. Let the ball alone; it has performed its work right well; you only make it angry with your probes. Put on a cool cataplasm if you will, and tell me about what hour will be the end; for I see in your face that you know what I say is true. I would not go out of the world like a heathen; but the Church is the only surgeon for me."

The man of healing answered in a vague and doubtful manner, but assured the old soldier that there was no immediate danger; and, after some vain persuasions, to the end

that he might once more examine the wound minutely, he took his leave, after having applied what he thought fit externally.

Helen was about to follow, and leave the commander and his friend together, once more; but the wounded man called her to him and bade her stay. "Here is Estoc will be a friend to you, Helen, when I am gone," he said; "but listen to me, poor child, and do that which is for your own good, and for that of others. I pressed you, a little while ago, to go to your uncle for your own sake; but now I ask it for the sake of those who were once dear to you. You used to love Rose d'Albret—I think you do so still—"

"Oh! that I do," cried Helen, clasping her hands.

"Well, then," said the commander, "her whole happiness, her future welfare and peace may altogether depend upon your going to Marzay, and with your own lips telling Walter de la Tremblade all that has happened to you."

"Then I will go directly," cried Helen, eagerly, though sadly, "I will go directly, if I die the next moment. But does he not know the whole already?"

"I think not," replied Estoc, who stood near. "I don't think Madame de Chazeul has told him anything, for the good man, who spoke to me about it, said she would kill him if she knew that he had mentioned anything. But he thought you hardly treated, mademoiselle, and wished me to speak to the commander about it, that the matter might be inquired into."

Helen covered her face and sat and mused, till, at length, the wounded man woke her from her painful dreams, whatever they were, by saying, in a compassionate tone, "Ah! my poor girl, you suffer worse than I do, for your pains are of the heart."

"I will go, sir, I will go!" cried Helen; "though it is very bitter so to do, yet I will go, if it can serve Mademoiselle d'Albret, even in the very least."

"It may serve her much, young lady," said Estoc. "As this sad affair has happened, and she has fallen into the hands of the Leaguers, beyond all doubt they will send her to Marzay; and then the old story will begin again, and no devilish scheme will be too bad, to drive her to marry Monsieur de Chazeul."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Helen vehemently; "he will betray her—he will make her miserable, as he has made me. What right has he to marry her?" she continued, with her brow contracted and a wild look coming into her eyes. "Is he not married already? is he not contracted by oaths that he cannot break?"

"Ay, but he will break them," replied Estoc.

"I rave, I rave!" said Helen, after a moment's pause; "he has broken them already—every vow he made—every pledge he gave—every oath he took! and at what should he hesitate? But how can I prevent this? What can I do to avert it?"

"Much," answered the commander. "Your uncle, Helen, has been one of the prime movers in all this. Without him they could do little: for he is a skilful and a scheming man, not moved by the same passions that both prompt and embarrass them. What are his motives or his views, I know not; but, *pardie*, right sure am I, when once he hears how you have been treated, he will find means to frustrate all their plots, and to save our dear Rose, by one means or another."

"Yes, yes, he will—he will," cried Helen; "I know he will, if it be but in revenge. Oh! he never wants means to work his own will. My poor father used to say, he had ruled all his family from infancy. But I will go at all risks, at any cost. Yet," she added, hanging her head, "yet I could wish that it were possible for me to avoid that cruel and hard-hearted man, whom I must see if I go there openly."

"Oh! that will be easily managed," said Estoc; "I will answer for that, mademoiselle; for I took care to ensure myself and my good commander here, the means of entering the Château of Marzay when we liked. God forbid that I should use it wrongly! But I foresaw, the time might come, when, in justice to ourselves or others, we might need to stand face to face with those who have been plotting so darkly against people whose rights they should have protected."

"You are right, Estoc, you are right," said the old commander, whose voice was growing feeble, with the fatigue of speaking so much. "You are right, my good friend. I thought not of that precaution, but it was a wise one. Have you got the key of the postern, then?"

"No," answered Estoc; "that would be missed; but I have got a key to the chapel, which, as no one uses that way in or out, will never be wanted by any one but ourselves."

Helen raised her eyes and smiled, with the first look of satisfaction that her countenance had borne since she had been driven from the Château of Chazeul. "That makes all easy," she said; "for, not only can I enter by that means, but dear Rose d'Albret can come out; and oh! what would I give to guide her back again to liberty and him she loves?"

But Estoc shook his head. "That may not be so easy," he answered; "now they are once upon their guard, they will watch

her closely. She will be henceforth a prisoner, indeed. Her only hope is in the priest, mademoiselle. Gain his aid for us, and we are secure."

"I will try," answered Helen, "I will try. But look," she continued, touching Estoc's arm and speaking in a low voice, "Monsieur de Liancourt seems weary, and asleep, I think."

Estoc bent down his head, and gazed in the sick man's face, by the pale light of a lamp that stood upon the table. He almost feared, from all that he had seen, that what Helen imagined slumber was the repose of death; but, as he leaned over him, he saw a red spot upon the cheek, and heard the quick low breath come and go; and, turning to her again, he whispered, "He sleeps; that is a good sign. I will sit with him till he wakes."

"No, no," answered Helen; "leave me to watch him. You take some repose; I neither want it, nor could obtain it."

Estoc accordingly left her, gaining the door as noiselessly as he could. Then, clearing the hall of all the persons by whom it was now crowded, he seated himself on a bench, ate some bread and drank some wine; and leaning his head upon his hand, soon fell into slumber, with that easy command over the drowsy god, which is often acquired by those habituated to the labours and the dangers of the camp.

It was past one o'clock; and all the noises of the house were still. The farmer and his family had retired to rest, the soldiers and attendants were seeking slumber in the kitchen and the barn, when Helen de la Tremblade opened the door between the sick man's chamber and the hall, and called, "Estoc! Estoc!—Monsieur de Liancourt is awake," she added, as he started up, and then continued in a lower tone, "he is very ill—there is a terrible change. Come quick, come quick!"

Estoc followed in haste; and, approaching the wounded man's side, he saw too clearly the change she spoke of, that awful change which precedes dissolution; that inexpressible dim shade, that cold unearthly look, never, never to be mistaken. Fever may banish the rose from the cheek; the eye may grow pale and glassy; the lip may lose its red; and sickness, heavy sickness may take away all that is beautiful in life; but yet, while there is a hope remaining, the countenance of man never assumes that hue which death sends before him as his herald on the way;—and there it was. To the eyes of Helen it was strange and terrible, and made her heart sink though she knew not all it meant; but Estoc had seen it often, and knew it well; and whispering to her, "This is death!" he took his old friend's hand in his.

"Ah, Estoc!" said Monsieur de Liancourt, "where is Helen? Come nearer, my kind nurse, let me see your face, for my eyes grow dim."

"Shall I send for a priest, sir?" asked Helen.

"Not yet," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "for I have much to say. Bring me my cross of St. John. Lay it on my breast, that I may die under the standard of my salvation." Helen hurried to get it, where it lay with the armour and clothes in which he had been dressed, and placed it gently on his bosom as he told her. The old man gazed wistfully in her face for an instant, and then said, "I am going, Helen—fast. If I had lived I would have been a father to you. Estoc, will you protect her—defend her? Do you promise me?"

"I do from my heart," replied Estoc. "As long as I live she shall never want a home to receive her, or an arm to do her right."

"Kiss the cross!" said the old commander; and, bending down, the good soldier pressed his lips upon it, as it lay upon his dying leader's bosom.

"So much for that," said the commander. "When I am gone, Estoc, give her all that I have brought with me. You, I have provided for long ago. See me buried as a soldier should be. Lay me before the altar at Marzay, and bid the priest say masses for my soul. Now give me the papers that I may explain them well."

Estoc proceeded to the corner of the room in which the old commander's garments had been laid down in a heap; and searched for some minutes before he could discover the packet of papers for which he was looking. He found it at length, and, turning round, approached the bedside where Helen de la Tremblade sat watching the wounded man. She held his hand in hers, she gazed upon him eagerly with her beautiful lips slightly open, shewing the fine pearly teeth within; and, as the light of the lamp fell upon her, she was certainly as fair a creature as ever man beheld; but there was a look of anxious fear in her eyes that startled Estoc, and made him hurry his pace. The eyes of the old commander were closed, and Helen whispered, "He has had a terrible shudder."

"Here are the papers, sir," said Estoc.

The old man made no answer, but by a heavy sigh.

"Send for a priest, quick," cried Estoc; and Helen running hastily from the room, woke one of the soldiers in the kitchen, and despatched him to the village in haste. When she returned to the chamber, however, all was still: and, approaching with her light foot the bedside, she saw Estoc with his arms folded across his chest, and his eyes,

glistening with an unwonted tear, fixed upon the countenance of his old friend and leader, from which all expression seemed to have passed away. She listened but could hear no breath. The lips were motionless; the breast had ceased to heave; the hand, which he had lately held in her own, had fallen languidly on the bed; the other, by a last movement, had been brought to rest upon the cross which lay upon his bosom. Life had passed away, apparently in an instant, and the sufferings of the stout old soldier were at an end.

The moment after several of the men, who had been awakened by a voice calling to one of them to seek a priest, crept into the room to see their good leader once more before he died; and Estoc, brushing away the moisture from his eyes with the back of his hand, turned towards them, saying, "You may come forward. You cannot disturb him now. He is gone; and a better heart, a stouter hand, a kinder spirit, never lived, my friends. Few there are like him left; and we at least never shall see such another. God have mercy on his soul, and on ours too."

Thus saying, he knelt down, murmured a prayer, and kissed the hand, still warm with the life that was departed. The soldiers did the same one by one, and then carried the tidings to their fellows who were still asleep. Starting up as they had lain down, they all ran hastily into the room; and, of course, amongst the number, there were many different ways of expressing their grief. Most of them, however, had tears in their eyes, and one man wished aloud, that he knew the hand that fired the shot.

"Fie," said Estoc, "it was the chance of battle. No soldier bears revenge for anything done in fair fight. He has sent many to their account, and now is sent himself; but by the grace of God his is no heavy one, and he will find mercy for that."

There was a momentary pause, and then two or three of the soldiers whispered together; after which one of them stepping forward, said, "Will you lead us, Monsieur Estoc?"

"I am not a rich man, my friends," said the old soldier, "and cannot pay you as the good commander did. What I have, however, you shall freely share; and if you are willing to serve the king as you have done this day, I will lead you willingly in that cause."

"We will fight in none other," replied the man who spoke for the rest; "and as for pay, we will take our chinee, so that we have food and arms."

"That we will always find," replied Estoc, "but we have a duty here to perform before anything else. We must carry the corpse to Marzay, and fulfil our dead leader's last commands; then we will seek the king; and, if

he cannot entertain us himself, we shall easily find some banner under which to fight upon his side."

CHAPTER XX.

NEMOURS'S CHALLENGE.

It was about two o'clock in the day, when the party of the Duke of Nemours entered the little town of Maintenon; for that prince hurried along his prisoners at a rapid rate, although he was aware that the main body of fugitives from the field of Ivry having taken a different direction, he was less likely to be pursued than if he had followed the same course towards Mantes. As he approached Maintenon, indeed, he somewhat slackened his speed, and gave orders for putting his men into better order; and before he reached the gates he brought his own horse, and those of the rest, to a walk, as if quietly marching through the country.

All appearance of flight and apprehension was banished; and De Montigni heard one of the soldiers, speaking to a citizen as they entered, declare, that they had had a skirmish at Ivry, in which the king had been defeated and driven back. A somewhat bitter smile curled his lip; but he made no observation; and the good townsman shaking his head with a doubtful look, replied,

"Ay, it may be so; but different tidings are about the place; and if you have won a battle, why are you marching away from the field?"

"Why, Coquin," replied the soldier readily, "because we are carrying the tidings to Chartres, with orders to the governor to send out his people and cut off the fugitives from Alençon."

Still the man looked unconvinced; but the soldier rode on after his troop; and the duke stopped in the town two hours to refresh his horses. While there, he sent for the officer commanding in the place, and held a long, private conversation with him, which afforded an opportunity to De Montigni and Rose d'Albret to speak together unnoticed, for the first time since their capture. The duke had ordered dinner to be prepared, and had courteously invited them to partake of it, leaving them alone in the dining hall of the inn, while he held his communication with the governor without. But though it was a solace and a comfort to both of them, to be enabled to pour their griefs and anxieties into each other's bosom, yet their conference was a sad and fruitless one; for they could arrange no plan of action for the future, they could extract no hope from the

painful situation in which they were placed. All they could do was to promise and re-promise faith and constancy to each other, and to wait for coming events, in the hope of ultimate deliverance. De Montigni found no difficulty in binding Rose to fly with him whenever the opportunity should offer; and each vowed to the other to look upon their engagement as complete and inviolable, whatever means might be employed to break it.

"Let us regard ourselves as wedded, dearest Rose," said De Montigni; "and fear not for the result. The king is each day gaining advantages over his enemy. This faction must soon be crushed, notwithstanding the assistance it receives from Spain; my ransom will soon be agreed upon; and should they attempt to detain my bride, I will deliver her, should need be, with the strong hand. If bloodshed be the result, let Chazeul answer for it. The fault is his, not mine."

"Oh! no, no!" cried Rose; "do nothing rashly, Louis. I am yours, will be ever yours. Better to wait for months—ay, even for years, than dip your hands in kindred blood. But I will trust that there is no need for such terrible deeds. When once the king's authority is at all established, Monsieur de Liancourt will soon yield to it. He is not one of those who will hold out to the last, in favour of a failing cause. But, at all events," she added, as the door opened, "be the time long or short, be the trial hard or light, I am yours for ever."

She knew not how hard that trial was to be.

As she spoke, the Duke of Nemours, with one or two of the gentlemen attached to him, entered the room; and the meal which he had ordered was soon after served. The irritation under which he had laboured, on account of the loss of the battle, when first De Montigni and his fair companion had fallen into his hands, had passed away; and towards Rose d'Albret, at least, he had resumed all that courtesy for which he was renowned. To De Montigni his demeanour was varying and uncertain; never, indeed, returning to the harsh rudeness which he had at first displayed, but sometimes cold and icy, sometimes gay and almost kind. He was a prince who had acquired, without much cause, a high reputation throughout Europe, and De Montigni knew him by report to be brave to a fault, generous to prodigality, and affecting a chivalrous tone in his conduct and manners; but he was not aware of the faults, which afterwards developed themselves so remarkably and caused the duke's ruin and his death—selfishness, ambition, tyrannical severity, and a wild vanity, that led him to over-estimate in all

things his own abilities, and his own importance.

As they sat together at the table, for a time, the fairer points of the duke's character were alone exhibited to his prisoners. He addressed De Montigni more than once, pressed Rose to partake of the meal before them, spoke of the events of the battle, and even lauded highly the skill and character of the king. The young baron deceived himself into the belief that these external signs of a high and noble nature might be the genuine indications of the heart; and he resolved to cast himself upon his generosity, to explain to him the circumstances in which he stood, and to beseech him to refrain, at least for a short period, from placing Made-moiselle d'Albret in the power of those who were but too likely to misuse the opportunity. As if to check him in such purposes, almost the next moment Nemours resumed towards him his haughty and overbearing manner; and thus he went on from time to time; at one moment appearing to forget that De Montigni was an adversary and a prisoner, and the next treating him almost as if he were a condemned criminal.

After the space of repose I have mentioned, the march towards Chartres was resumed, but the pace at which they proceeded was not slow: and before they reached that fair old town, the sun set in cloudless splendour, and the stars looked out in the sky. Weary, silent, anxious, and distressed, Rose d'Albret rode on, replying to the frequent attentions of Nemours with but a monosyllable, till at length they reached the gates, where they were detained during a few minutes; for the news of the defeat of Ivry had already reached the city, and all was anxious precaution to guard against surprise. At length the party was admitted; torches were procured at the Corps de Garde; and by their red and gloomy light, flashing upon the tall houses with their manifold small windows, the cavalcade wound on, through the narrow streets, towards the castle.

Intelligence of the arrival of the Duke of Nemours had been sent on to the governor from the gates; and the outer court of the citadel was filled with gentlemen and officers when the party entered. Nemours dismounted from his horse as soon as he had given the word to halt; and, advancing to a stern-looking, middle-aged man, who seemed to be the chief of those present, he embraced him, saying,

"Well, Monsieur de la Bourdasières, I have come to you sooner than I expected. We have been badly served at Ivry; and the foreign troops have once more betrayed our confidence. However, I bring two prisoners with me—or at least one," he added, "for the lady is not a prisoner, and

of her I will speak to you by-and-bye, if you will have the goodness now to place her for the time under the protection of Madame de la Bourdasières."

The governor seemed to ask a question, which De Montigni did not hear; but Nemours replied, immediately, "Oh, yes, of the highest. It is Mademoiselle d'Albret, the daughter of the late Count de Marnes."

"Right willingly," replied the governor. "We will give her what poor entertainment we can;" and advancing with Nemours to the side of Rose's jennet, he assisted her to dismount, saying, "My wife will be most happy to entertain you, Mademoiselle d'Albret."

Rose turned an anxious look towards De Montigni, who sprang from his horse, and approaching her before any one could interfere, took her hand, saying, "I am rejoiced to find you placed under such protection, dearest Rose."

The governor turned a grave and inquiring look towards him; but De Montigni added, loud enough for all to hear, "Do not fear. The contract for our marriage, between your father and my uncle, cannot be broken, let them do what they will."

"Come, come, enough of this, sir!" said the Duke of Nemours; and the governor, taking Rose by the hand, led her away into the castle.

"Monsieur de Nemours," said the young nobleman, as soon as she was gone, "I am your prisoner; and I cannot blame you for seizing the momentary advantage you had obtained, to make me so. I know the reputation of the Duke of Nemours too well to suppose that he will show any want of courtesy toward one placed in such a situation; I, therefore, demand to be put to ransom, and that without further delay, according to the common customs and usages of war."

Nemours gazed at him, for an instant, from head to foot, and then, turning on his heel, replied, "I will consider of it, sir."

A sharp reply was springing to De Montigni's lips; but he repressed it, recollecting how much the fate of himself and one most dear to him, might depend upon the man to whom he was speaking. The colour came in his cheek, however; and he bit his lip to keep down the anger which could scarcely be suppressed, while Nemours, calling one of his gentlemen to him, gave some directions in a low tone.

"Take a parole from his servant," he said, aloud, in conclusion, "and let him have free ingress and egress to wait upon his master. As to the chamber, speak with some of the people of Monsieur de la Bourdasières about it;" and then turning round to

De Montigni again, he added, "We shall meet to-morrow, sir; in the meantime, good-night."

Thus saying, he walked away and entered the castle, marshalled by some of the officers of the governor. De Montigni remained for a moment or two, while the followers of Nemours and the people assembled in the court conversed together round about him, in regard to the events of the day, and many an anxious inquiry was addressed to those who had shared in the battle, as to the course which it had taken, and the results which it was likely to produce. Each man answered according to his particular character and disposition. Some made light of it; asserted that it could scarcely be called a battle lost; that Mayenne was at the head of nearly as many men as ever; and that, though the enemy did possess the field, they had paid dearly for it. Others, more sincere, or more alarmed, acknowledged, that at last it had been a complete rout, that each had fled as best he could, and that the king was pursuing Mayenne, sword in hand, towards Mantes. Others contented themselves with a significant shrug of the shoulders, or a simple exclamation of anger and mortification; but, upon the whole, the governor's officers easily divined that a great victory had been won by the Royalists—a terrible defeat sustained by their own party.

At length, the gentleman to whom Nemours had last spoken, and who had been conversing with another man at some distance, advanced towards De Montigni, saying, "Now, Monsieur le Baron, if you will follow me and Monsieur de la Haye, we will show you to your chamber. Come hither," he continued, beckoning to De Montigni's servant, who had been taken with him; "you can wait upon your master till he is ransomed, so you will see where he lodges;" and, leading the way with the officer to whom he had been speaking, he conducted the young nobleman into the castle. Following the walls which in those days were extensive, he approached a small detached building, which seemed to be used as a house of refreshment for the soldiery, or what we should, in the present day, call the canteen.

The lower storey was thronged with men drinking and talking; but, walking through the passage, they reached a narrow and ill-constructed stair which led to some rooms above. In one of these was found a bed, a table, and a chair, all of the homeliest description. The casements were not in the best state of repair, and no curtains were there to keep out the glare of day or the winds of night. The walls were in the rough primeval state in which the hands of

the mason had left them, and everything bore an aspect of misery and discomfort, not very consoling to the eyes of the captive.

This, he was informed, was to be his abode while he remained in the city of the Druids: and, well knowing that remonstrance was in vain, he seated himself in the solitary chair, while the officer of Nemours took the parole of his servant, and then, making a cold bow to the prisoner, retired.

De Montigni remained in silence, with his head resting on his hand, for a moment or two, while his follower gazed on him with a disconsolate countenance; but at length, the man ventured to interrupt his master's reverie by saying, "This is a strange place to put you in, sir. Not very civil, *pardie*, though you be a prisoner."

"The place matters little, my good friend," answered the young nobleman. "We slept in the Alps in worse abodes than this. It is the being a prisoner that makes the lodging bad—and at such a time too!" he added, with a bitter sigh, "when happiness was within my grasp; when the cause of the king was victorious; when another minute would have saved us both."

"'Twas unlucky indeed, sir," said the servant. "They say fortune changes every seven years; God forbid that ours should last as long, for we have made a sad beginning in France. But, at all events, I will try to render the place somewhat more comfortable for you, sir. Money will do anything in Chartres, as well as elsewhere."

"Would to Heaven it would get me out of it!" replied De Montigni. "He will never dare refuse to put me to ransom, surely?"

"I do not know, sir," rejoined the man. "I have heard that, in these civil wars, they have done strange things; but, if he do, you must make your escape, sir; and, as I was saying just now, money can do everything."

De Montigni shook his head, but he suffered the man to proceed as he thought fit to give the chamber an air of greater comfort. A sconce was brought up from below, to replace the solitary lamp which had been left by the officer; a piece of tapestry was obtained from some other quarter to cover the window; a bundle of rushes were found to strew the floor; a white sheet was spread over the bed, to cover the somewhat dirty furniture with which it had been previously decorated; and, thanks to the proximity of the canteen, wine and provisions of various kinds soon ornamented the table, which was covered with one of those fine white cloths for which, Le Grand assures us, France was at that time famous.

But, when the door opened and closed, De Montigni saw the figure of a soldier, either passing to and fro, or leaning on his partizan;

and he felt bitterly that he was a prisoner, without power to alter the course of events which were taking place around him, to the destruction of all his hopes, to the frustration of those dreams of joy in which he had indulged but a few hours before. With the usual course of bitter and unavailing regret in a young and inexperienced mind, he reproached himself for not having done every act that might have averted the misfortune which had fallen upon him. He blamed himself for having joined the battle, when he had no occasion to do so; he forgot all the inducements and arguments to which his mind had yielded when he left Rose in the farm at Mainville, in order to share in the glories and the dangers of the field of Ivry. He next regretted that, anxious to bear her the first tidings of success, he had hurried back as soon as he saw the fight irretrievably turned against the Leaguers, and acknowledged that he ought to have gone on with the king in pursuit of the enemy.

He who knows by frequent trial the fallibility of human judgment, and how often the best calculations are proved false by the unexpected turns of fate, judges as surely as he can by the light of reason, acts resolutely when his decision is formed, and leaves the rest to the will of God, thanking Him who alone gives success,—if his efforts prove effectual, bowing, without self-condemnation, if disappointment follows. But the young cannot do this; for it is the invariable fault of youth to attribute too much to human powers. We only discover their feebleness when we have tried them; and this is one of the first lessons of earthly existence, the great school wherein we learn, or, at least, may acquire, the knowledge that fits us for a higher state of being. The world is a school, and we are but schoolboys, and all that we obtain is destined for another scene.

The night which De Montigni first passed as a prisoner, was without repose, as it well might be. Had his busy thoughts permitted sleep to visit his eyelids during the first five hours of the night, the noises which rose up from below would have effectually banished the gentle guest; but those sounds were hardly heard by the captive, and, long after his servant had left him, he sat and mused; now reviewing the past; now forming airy schemes for the future, destroyed as soon as raised; now pondering over the bitter present with unavailing anger and regret. Shortly after daylight, he was up and dressed; and, when his servant again appeared, he sent him at once to the Duke of Nemours to know when he would fix his ransom, according to the custom of the day. The answer was cold and formal, "That Monsieur de Nemours would see the Baron de Montigni in the course of the morning,

and would then inform him of his intentions."

This was all that the man had been able to obtain; and, for many another impatient hour, De Montigni paced his narrow chamber, giving way to every dark and painful imagination, till, at length, a step, different from that of the guard at the door, was heard without, about an hour after noon, and the voice of the Duke of Nemours was instantly recognised by the prisoner, telling the soldier he might retire to the room below.

They were words of good augury to the young nobleman, who mentally said, "He comes to name my ransom;" and the impression was further confirmed by the cheerful and courteous countenance of the duke, who entered the moment after, more with the air of an old acquaintance than a captor.

"Well, Monsieur de Montigni," he said, "how have you passed the night? By heaven, they have assigned you but a paltry lodging here! 'Tis none of my doings this. La Bourdasière should have known better."

"The lodging matters little, my lord," answered De Montigni, "it is the imprisonment that is painful;" and, resolved to follow the determination he had formed the day before, and cast himself and Rose upon the generosity of the duke, he added, "Nor is it my own captivity that is the most grievous to me. It is the imprisonment of the lady you found with me."

"But she is not a prisoner, Monsieur de Montigni," replied Nemours; "therein you have made a mistake."

"She is worse than a prisoner, my lord duke," said the young nobleman, "if you send her back to the Château of Marzay. Nay, hear me out, my lord. I have ever heard that the Duke of Nemours is the flower of the French nobility for chivalrous generosity. His name has reached me even in Italy, where I have so long sojourned, and if when I entered France I had been asked on whom I would soonest rely for aid and protection in any honourable enterprise, I should have answered, 'On Monsieur de Nemours.' Now, my lord, I will tell you the plain truth regarding the situation of myself and Mademoiselle d'Albret, and if your own heart will suffer you to send her back to the captivity in which she is held at Marzay, I am much mistaken."

Montigni then proceeded to relate the circumstances in which he had found Rose on his return from Italy; the arts that had been employed to deceive them both; and the recourse which they had had to flight as the only means of delivering the lady from the position in which they had placed her. Nemours listened with a varying countenance, but without any interruption. At one

moment De Montigni thought he was touched; at another, a heavy frown came upon his brow; at another, a look of impatience passed over his face, as if he were tired of the tale; and when the young nobleman had ended, he replied in an indifferent tone—"All very lamentable, Monsieur de Montigni: but still, unless you were prepared to subscribe to the Holy Catholic Union, I should not be justified in retaining Mademoiselle d'Albret from her guardian. Even if you were, indeed, it would still be a consideration whether the long services of Monsieur de Chazeul would not require us to bestow the hand of the lady upon him, rather than upon a fresh and uncertain convert."

"What!" exclaimed De Montigni, hastily, "the contract with her father, her own inclination, and my undoubted right to count for nothing!"

"I am no lawyer," answered Nemours coldly; "I know nothing of contracts. If you think yourself injured in regard to that matter, the courts are open to you."

"Nay, nay, Monsieur de Nemours," cried De Montigni. "Do not, for your own good name's sake, treat the matter in such a tone! Do not sanction, by the approval of the Duke of Nemours, a line of conduct which you must feel has been most base and dishonourable!"

The duke coloured. "Well, sir," he answered, "I will not sanction it. If all the circumstances be as you say, wrong has been done. But I am very sorry, I cannot help it now. A different statement of the affairs has been made to me in letters from Chazeul; and, to end all in one word, the lady is already far on her way towards Marzay."

De Montigni started and gazed on him with a stern and angry brow. "And you have really done this thing?" he asked.

"I have," replied Nemours, returning his glance with one of equal fire.

"Then probably," said De Montigni, in a tone of bitter calmness, "Monsieur de Nemours is prepared still further to favour his friend's honest and honourable proceedings by retaining the lady's affianced husband in prison, and refusing to put him to ransom, as is customary amongst gentlemen in honourable warfare? Pray let me know my fate at once."

"No, sir," answered the duke, "I do not intend to do any such thing. I propose to set you free as soon as possible, either by exchange or ransom, for the very purpose of suffering you to pursue your claims to this lady's hand as you may think fit. There is one little preliminary, indeed, but that is a trifle which will be soon arranged."

"That is like the Duke of Nemours again," exclaimed De Montigni warmly. "What is the amount of ransom you demand?"

"Name it yourself, Monsieur de Montigni," replied Nemours.

"Will twenty thousand livres suffice?" asked the young baron.

"Fully!" said Nemours.

"Then they shall be yours with as much speed as can be used," replied De Montigni. "You will give me a messenger to my intendant at Montigni, who has more than enough in his hands to discharge the sum at once."

"Nay, I will do more," said Nemours, "I will set you free, to seek it yourself, and send it when you can. Your time may be valuable to you just now; and heaven forbid that I should detain you."

"Now you are generous indeed, my lord," answered De Montigni, "and my best thanks and gratitude are yours for ever."

"There is, however, one little preliminary," continued Nemours, in a somewhat dry tone; "which we must settle before you go."

"I suppose you mean a bond or engagement to pay the ransom?" said De Montigni.

"Not so, my young friend," answered Nemours with a bitter smile. "You will have the kindness to recollect, that yesterday on the pleasant banks of the Eure, at a place I believe called the ford of Mainville, you thought fit to charge me with want of courtesy towards a lady. Now, such charges should not be made lightly, and you have, moreover, by your conduct since—though not exactly in the same words—implied that you sustained that charge. The Duke of Nemours, sir, lies under imputation from no man living; and, therefore, waving the privileges of his rank, as a prince of a sovereign house, he is ready to wipe it out in your blood without further delay."

"Ah, Monsieur de Nemours," said De Montigni, "can you so tarnish the bright generosity you displayed just now, by—"

But Nemours waved his hand. "No more, sir," he said, "no more! Arguments on such subjects are vain. The man who submits to insult is a coward. You have heard what I have said. I pray you give me an answer."

"Assuredly, my lord," replied De Montigni, "I am happy that I have some privileges too to wave, in order in some degree to put me on a level with so high a prince."

"Indeed, sir!" said Nemours in a tone of some surprise; "may I inquire what they are?"

"Those of a prisoner, my lord," answered the young baron calmly. "It is an old law of honour and arms, that no prisoner or person under ransom can receive a challenge from any man, much less from his captor. Nor

is he bound to take the slightest notice of such an invitation, the shame, if there be any insult or provocation given, resting upon the giver." Nemours coloured; but De Montigni proceeded: "This, my lord duke, is the privilege that I now wave, to gratify you; but it is upon condition, that I name the terms and circumstances of our combat."

"Assuredly," replied Nemours, "that you have a right to demand. What are the terms?"

"Somewhat numerous, my lord," replied De Montigni. After a moment's thought, "First, that we fight without the town; next, that our combat be restricted to one pistol shot on each side; next, which is absolutely necessary, my time being precious as you justly said but now, that we be without seconds; for, as perhaps you are aware, I have no friends in this town.* Moreover, taking you at your word, I will request you in all courtesy to give me under your hand a passport to come and go, in return for which, I will give you a bond for the amount of the ransom, and by your permission, will send my servant, who is with me, to bring it at once from Montigni."

"Agreed, agreed," cried Nemours with a well-pleased air. "But you have forgotten to name the time, Monsieur de Montigni. I am at your disposal to-morrow, the next day, the day after—the day following that I must quit Chartres."

De Montigni smiled: "I hope to quit it to-day, Monsieur de Nemours," he replied. "It may take half-an-hour to have the ransom bond drawn; as long, perhaps, for me to buy a pistol, for you know that I was unarmed when you made me prisoner. Say half-an-hour more for any other unexpected impediment; and then I am at your service."

De Nemours embraced him as if he had done him the greatest favour, for such was the spirit of those times; and then calling to the guard from below, he discharged him from his task, bidding him bring materials for writing as speedily as possible.

"I will save you the trouble of purchasing pistols, Monsieur de Montigni," he continued; "you shall have one of mine; and there are no better in all France."

"You do me honour, sir," replied De

* The duel of one to one, without seconds or witnesses, was not uncommon at this time in France, especially when men were of high rank, and wished to void a serious quarrel without danger of interruption. They often also took place on horseback with the pistol, but Monsieur de Montell is wrong in stating under the reign of Henry IV., that it was a new custom to introduce seconds into duels. During the reign of Charles IX. and Henry III., the practice of fighting with a number of seconds who all took part in the affray, was general; and in the famous challenge of Henry IV. himself, when King of Navarre, to the Duke of Guise, he offered to fight him one to one, two to two, or ten to ten.

Montigni, "and I accept your offer with gratitude; but you must name our place of meeting, as I am unacquainted with this locality."

"There is a stone cross," said Nemours, "little more than a quarter of a league from the Porte Drouaise; it is so far on your way; and there is a convenient field hard by, where we can have room to turn our horses. Yours is somewhat weary I fear from yesterday's exertions, but mine is not less so, so that there will be no inequality."

Everything was soon arranged. The pistols were sent for, the ransom bond drawn up, the passport given, the signature of La Bourdasière obtained to it; and, as nearly three-quarters of an hour yet remained of the appointed time, to which the duke determined to be very punctual, he ordered refreshments to be brought up into the chamber of De Montigni, and there, talking gaily over a thousand indifferent subjects, passed half-an-hour as if he were occupied by no thoughts but those of peace and pleasure. De Montigni, on his part, did his best to maintain the same tone, and played his part as well as might be; but he was less accustomed to such transactions than his companion; and his thoughts would revert from time to time to Rose d'Albret, and a cloud of care would settle on his brow.

As time wore by, and the appointed hour approached, the duke called to the people below, and ordered his horse to be brought from the stables of the castle. Then, turning to De Montigni, he added, "I think, as you are not acquainted with the spot, it may be as well if I conduct you thither myself; but in the first place, despatch your servant on his errand. I will take care that none of mine follow us; and your horse can be brought round, after he is gone."

De Montigni made no objection, and the plan proposed was pursued. Nemours left his young companion for a few minutes, to make the arrangements necessary to guard against interruption; and, during the time that he was thus left alone, De Montigni wrote a few hasty lines to Rose d'Albret, telling her of the circumstances in which he was placed, and bidding her farewell, if he should fall. The letter was hardly sealed, when Nemours returned; and now that it was arranged they were to go forth for the purpose of taking each others' lives in deadly combat, he was all courtesy and urbanity, according to the customs of the day; and, to have heard his words, or to have witnessed his demeanour, one would have supposed that De Montigni was a dear and intimate friend, or perhaps a younger brother. Each charged the pistol of the other, each opened his pourpoint, to show that he had no secret, or coat of mail beneath; and then,

after some ceremonies as to who should first descend the stairs, the Duke of Nemours led the way. Mounting their horses, which they found, held by some of the soldiers, at the door, they rode together towards the gates of the citadel. Several of the gentlemen attached to the Duke of Nemours were assembled near the bridge, and De Montigni thought that there were somewhat grave and even angry looks upon their countenances, which might indicate that they were not quite so ignorant of the object of his companion and himself as they affected to be. A little farther on, at the outer gate, Monsieur de la Bourdasière came out of the guard-house, and approaching the horse of the Duke of Nemours, spoke to him for a moment in a low tone.

"Not if you value the friendship of Nemours," replied the duke sternly. "The man who interferes in the slightest degree is my enemy from that hour."

Thus saying he rode on; and passing the gates of Chartres, they advanced for some way along the road to Dreux, till at length the stone cross which the duke had mentioned appeared in sight, and dismounting from their horses they knelt before it, and prayed for some moments in silence. Then mounting again, they took their way across the plain, till they had lost sight of the cross, it being considered, in those days, improper to commit murder in the neighbourhood of that symbol of salvation, although, with the heart full of every passion and every purpose condemned by Christ, they would kneel and pray, as they passed under the cross of Him who died to bring peace upon earth, good-will amongst men. Then choosing an open field by the bank of the river, the duke made his companion a low bow, and wheeled his horse, saying, "Here, Monsieur de Montigni, we shall have space enough. We fire as we pass; and mind your aim be good!"

De Montigni bowed in return, and took his ground at the opposite side of the field.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RETURN TO MARZAY.

THE journey was long and tedious, the road heavy and bad, the coach which had been procured at Chartres ponderous and cumbersome, and the horses which had been placed in it unequal to drag its weight except at a slow and lingering pace. Poor Rose d'Albret sat far back in the vehicle, with her hands over her eyes, and the tears streaming fast down her cheek as they passed through the gates of Chartres, and as the last faint

traces of the dream of happiness in which she had been indulging, faded away, and left her a reality of misery, anxiety, and care.

Tardy as was their progress, the feet of the horses seemed all too quick in drawing her towards a scene in which she anticipated nothing but distress of many kinds; reproach from those who themselves deserved the bitterest censure, threats, importunity, persecution, and that constant effort to deceive, which she knew would require on her part continual watchfulness and a guard upon every word, and look, and action. She could no longer hope to give way to one feeling of the heart; the free spirit was to be chained down and bound; the candid and the frank, was to put on reserve and policy; the trustful and the confiding, was to assume doubt and suspicion: every bright quality of her own mind was to be cast away for the time, as useless in the warfare in which she was about to engage; and she was to be called upon to take up the weapons of her adversaries, in order to meet them upon equal terms. It was all bitter, in short; and Rose shrank from the contemplation, and felt a sickening hopelessness of heart, to which she had never given way before.

Then her thoughts turned to De Montigni; and for the first time she felt to the full how much she loved him. Short as had been the time that they had passed together since his return to France, those few hours had been as much as years in binding heart to heart, so full had they been of events, thoughts, and feelings, and now that she was separated from him, she asked herself, what would be his fate; meditated over all that he would suffer on her account, as well as the weary weight of imprisonment; and, judging rightly of his sensations, knew that his grief and anguish for her would be the most painful part of all he had to endure. She felt as if she were bound in gratitude to repay his anxiety, by equal grief for him; and, instead of endeavouring to console herself by listening to the voice of hope, she added, I may say, voluntarily, to her own sorrow, by dwelling upon his.

Thus passed hour after hour, as they rolled slowly on, while the party of horsemen who guarded her, urged the coachman to greater speed, though, if her voice could have obtained a hearing, she would have besought him to delay at every step, rather than hurry on to a place, the very thought of which was horrible to her. The driver, however, was not one to be moved in any degree by the exhortations of his companions; and neither slower nor faster did he go, for all that could be said to him. At the same dilatory pace he proceeded, paused twice to water and to feed his horses, and seemed as deaf

to the apprehensions of the guard, lest they should be overtaken by any party of the enemy, as to the threats which they held out of the anger of the governor and the Duke of Nemours. Thus night fell just before they reached a little town, not much more than half way to Marzay; and the coachman, declaring that his horses could proceed no farther that day, pulled up at the door of what was then called a *Gîte* or sleeping-place, and proceeded unceremoniously to detach the cattle from the vehicle, giving no heed whatsoever, either to the questions or remonstrance of an old man who was in command of the troop.

As nothing could be done but to remain where they were, Rose was led to her bed-chamber, and told, in civil terms enough, that, by her leave, they would proceed at daybreak on the following morning. The old man paid every attention to her comfort, according to the orders he had received; and even listened, while, encouraged by his courteous manner, she ventured to remonstrate upon the conduct pursued towards her in carrying her against her will to a place so hateful to her. He replied coldly, that the affair was none of his; he did but obey his orders; and Rose soon found, by the strictness with which she was watched, and by the placing of a guard at her chamber door, that the hope of escaping, and flying on foot at any risk, was altogether vain.

The journey of the next day went on as that of the day just gone; and it was evening when the sight of many well-known objects, the wood through which she had often ridden, the little chapel where she had frequently stopped to pray, the hamlet, the church, the fountain, the stream, all of which she recollected, showed her that they were within a few miles of the place in which her youth had been spent. How changed were now all her feelings, from those with which she had wandered through the same scenes in girlhood! Where was now the sunshine of the heart, which at once lighted up every object around? Where was the interest with which imagination had invested all that now seemed so dead and cold? Some light had gone out in life since she was last there; and the visionary splendour had departed.

In about half an hour more, they came to the side of a hill, from which the Château of Marzay was visible, at the distance of about a mile. The evening sun was just setting, and casting long streams of light and shadow over the undulating country below. The snow had disappeared; the green herbage of the fields was seen; the brown branches of the wood grew warm and glowing in the evening rays; the river swollen with rain rushed on like a torrent of blood, reflecting

the glowing crimson of the west, and every window of the château flashed back the bright beams of light, in lines almost too dazzling for the eye. Round the summits of the towers, however, as they rose above the eminence on which the castle was built, rolled a thin dull cloud of leaden vapour, faintly tinged with red, on the side next to the sun; and as the carriage moved slowly on, it descended lower and lower over the building, rendering the lines and angles indistinct to the eye, like the fate which awaited the poor girl who was journeying thither. She gazed out eagerly towards it with a heavy sigh, and a heart weighed down with the certainty of coming sorrow; and then turning her eyes over the open ground below, she traced the road which she had followed in her flight with De Montigni, and could have wept to think how vain had proved all the hopes that bore her up through the fatigues and discomforts of that journey.

Suddenly from behind a clump of trees, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, emerged slowly a figure on horseback, bearing in his hand what Rose at first imagined to be a lance. The next moment, however, she perceived that it was a cross; and, at the same solemn pace, following the first on foot, came six other men carrying something like a litter on their shoulders. The light caught upon it, however, as they began to ascend the slope towards the château, and Rose saw the fluttering of a pall; several other persons followed, likewise on foot, and then a party of some fifteen or sixteen horsemen, with lances lowered, and a pennon flickering in the wind.

"They are bearing back a dead body to the château, mademoiselle," said the old man, who was riding by the side of the carriage at the moment; "likely some one who has fallen at Ivry. Perhaps we had better stop and let them get before us. It is unlucky to go in with a corpse."

"Unlucky to go in at all," said Rose sadly; "do as you will, sir, I am a captive, and have no authority in such matters."

The old man gave orders to halt; and the funeral procession of the good old Commander de Liancourt, which was following a road that formed an acute angle with the one they were themselves pursuing, moved slowly on towards the château. When it had come within three or four hundred yards of the gates, the Count de Liancourt, with his nephew Chazeul, and a number of the soldiers and attendants, came forth to meet it, preceded by father Walter, and two boys, belonging to the chapel, dressed in their robes. The procession immediately halted; and Estoc dismounting from his horse, advanced a few steps in front to confer with the count and his companions,

The loss of a brother, to a man in the decline of life, can never be a matter of indifference, and Monsieur de Liancourt was evidently much agitated; but there were other feelings in his bosom, besides those of mere grief, and his manner was hesitating and embarrassed, as he returned Estoc's grave salutation, and listened to the solemn words:—

"I have brought back to you, sir, the corpse of your brother, Michael de Liancourt, commander of the Order of St. John, who fell, gallantly fighting for his king, on the glorious field between St. André and Ivry; and I claim your permission to carry it into the chapel of the château, according to his own request."

"I receive my poor brother's body at your hands, Monsieur Estoc," replied the count, "and thank you for your letter of this morning; but as you know we have few people in the castle, and many of us not altogether holding the same opinions as yourself, you cannot expect us to suffer you to enter with such a body of armed men."

"We are armed, Sir Count," answered Estoc, "as soldiers carrying the body of a soldier; but you know right well, we come in peace upon so sad an errand. As soon as we have performed our duty, we will depart in peace, if we are suffered to do so; but what we have undertaken we will perform, and trust to meet with no opposition."

"This is foolishness, sir," cried Chazeul sharply; "you cannot expect such permission, after all that has taken place; and, in one word, you may enter yourself with any two or three, but no more shall have admission."

Estoc's cheek grew red. "To you, young man," he replied, "I do not speak, for you are not the lord of that château, and never will be; but to you, Monsieur de Liancourt, I answer, we have all of us sworn to lay the body of our old leader before the altar of the chapel of Marzay, and we will do it. If you will give us admission, well; if not, I will bear it back to the church in the village, there set it down till we are joined by the men of Montigni, and then forcing my way in at the point of the sword, will keep my oath, whoever tries to stay me. You know old Estoc too well to believe that he will break his word; so choose, and that quickly, for it is growing late."

But at this moment father Walter interposed, advancing with an air of grave authority, and saying, "Cease, cease! in the name of decency and Christian charity, cease! and in the presence of the dead, let us have peace. My son," he continued, turning to the count, "you will never, I am sure, oppose Monsieur Estoc in carrying in the body of our poor friend into the chapel

according to his vow, if he pledge his word to retire immediately after it be accomplished. You, Monsieur Estoc, will never refuse to plight your word as a French gentleman, to retread your steps as soon as you have laid the corpse before the altar, without doing injury to any one, or interfering in any way with the affairs of the castle."

"Most willingly, good father," replied Estoc; "I come but for one purpose; and as soon as that is accomplished, I am more anxious than anyone to leave this place at once, for I have promised to lead these good fellows back to join the king, and reap our share in the fruits of this great victory."

"Then it is true that Henry won the battle?" asked Monsieur de Liancourt.

"Ay, sir!" answered Estoc, "most true—and a decisive battle it was. The League is now nothing but a name."

Chazeul smiled contemptuously; but the priest brought back the discussion to the point, saying, "Monsieur de Liancourt, you have not answered. I trust you will be satisfied with this promise."

The count hesitated; but Estoc, turning towards him with a reproachful look, demanded, "Have you known me so long, Monsieur de Liancourt, and yet doubt my word? I promise you, sir, to quit the castle with these good men, as soon as I have laid that bier before the altar, and given father Walter here the message which I have to deliver to him, regarding the watching of the body and the masses for the soul."

"Well," said the count, whose eyes had been turned for a moment to the hill behind Estoc, "well, I consent on condition, sir, that you immediately retire to the village without meddling in any way with what you may see within the castle. Do you promise as a man of honour?"

"I do!" replied Estoc; "though I know not what you are afraid I should interfere with. But as I come here for a fixed purpose, when that is accomplished, I will go."

"Well, then, march on!" said the count; "and we, as mourners for my brother, will bring up the rear."

The order was accordingly given, and the funeral train was once more put in motion. The party of the count, with the exception of father Walter, who remained in front, paused till the rest had passed, and then fell in behind; but, on a word from Monsieur de Liancourt, one of his attendants quitted the line, and at a quick pace sped up the hill to the spot where the coach, containing poor Rose d'Albret, was still standing. Had Estoc been aware of whom that vehicle contained, it might have changed the fate of many an after day; but as yet he had not perceived it at all; and following the corpse

of his old leader with a slow and heavy step, while a thousand memories of other days, associated with the very building he was now entering, pressed sadly on his mind, he ascended the slope with his eyes bent down upon the ground, till the body passed the low arch of the gate, and he found himself in the outer court, so long familiar to his footsteps.

The priest, in the meantime, sped on into the chapel, in order to receive the body with the usual ceremonies; and, dismounting from their horses, the soldiers who had followed the old commander to the field of Ivry, soon thronged the space before the altar, with their armed forms falling into fine but sombre groups, as the last faint rays of the setting sun streamed through the stained glass window on the western side, and cast their long shadows across the floor, covered with many a monumental stone and inscription. The Count de Liancourt and Chazeul stood behind, with their followers and attendants; and even when the ceremony was over, they lingered still, as if to see the old soldier and his comrades quit the chapel.

Estoc looked round more than once in the hope that they were gone. Perhaps he wished to give way to the feelings of sorrow and regret that were strong in his heart, without the presence of colder witnesses. Perhaps he wished to have some private conversation with the priest before he departed. But the count and his companions remained where they were; and finding that they had no intention of retiring, he at length turned to the priest, saying, "Monsieur de la Tremblade, I have now to ask you, on behalf of him who is gone, first, to say one hundred masses for the repose of his soul."

The priest bowed his head, replying, "It shall be done right willingly, my son."

And Estoc proceeded, "Secondly, to keep vigil this night and to-morrow by the body, till the hour of matins."

"It is unusual, my son," answered the priest, "except in the case of very high personages; but still, as you require it, it shall be done."

"I beseech you in charity to do so, father," replied Estoc: "and I know that which you promise you will accomplish."

"Without fail," answered father Walter, and Estoc, turning from the chapel, led his men back into the court. The first object his eyes fell upon was a carriage, apparently just arrived and surrounded by several armed men, bearing the green scarfs of the League. The door of the coach was open, and a lady in the act of alighting; and the next moment Rose d'Albret held out her hands to the old soldier, exclaiming, "Ah! good Estoc!"

Yielding to the first impulse, Estoc sprang forward towards her, exclaiming, "Have

they brought you here already, dear lady?"

"Much against my will," replied Mademoiselle d'Albret; but Chazeul and the Count de Liancourt instantly interposed.

"You promised, sir," exclaimed the latter, "to retire from the château without interfering with anything that you might see or hear. Is this the way you keep your word?"

"I will keep my word with you, sir," answered Estoc, "better than you have kept yours with this lady's father. Alas! Mademoiselle d'Albret," he continued, "I am bound to quit this place at once; and all I can say is, that steadfast truth and firmness will prevail at last, and so I must bid you farewell."

As he spoke, he kissed her hand and turned away; and Rose, yielding to a violent burst of tears, suffered herself to be led into the building by the Count de Liancourt, who remained silent till they reached the hall, where the first object that presented itself to her eyes, in the dim twilight that now reigned through the wide chamber, was the tall harsh form of the Marchioness de Chazeul, advancing as if to meet her. For a moment, Rose's heart sunk at the sight; but, the next instant, she murmured to herself, "I must not give way. My task is one of firmness, and I must not yield to any weakness like this."

"So, girl, so," cried Jacqueline de Chazeul; "all your fine plots have proved of no avail! Was it not decent, delicate, and feminine, to fly from your guardian's protection and cast yourself, unmarried, into the arms of a man you scarcely know?"

"Scarcely know!" exclaimed Rose d'Albret; "whom do I know so well? But, madam, to fly with him was my only choice, in order to escape the arts and persecutions which I was sure to encounter here. I believe that I was justified by the contract of my father, which had been so long concealed from me. I could trust to the honour of the man to whom my father had engaged my hand; and I went to seek from the king that protection and justice which I was not likely to meet with where I was best entitled to expect it."

"You have learned boldness enough, it seems, minion," replied Madame de Chazeul, in a sharp tone, "and, if you think to justify yourself here, by saying that it was to a heretic usurper you fled, to one condemned and degraded by God and the apostolic church, from your lawful guardian and the husband whom he has selected for you, you are very much mistaken."

"To you, madam, I seek not to justify myself at all," replied Rose; "I have nought to do with you, nor you with me. To Monsieur de Liancourt, when he thinks fit, I

am ready, in private, to assign the motives of my conduct, and to none else am I responsible."

"I will teach you that I have to do with you, pretty lady," replied Madame de Chazeul. "Have you not deceived and ill-treated my son? and you shall make him full atonement, before I quit this château."

"I have not ill-treated nor deceived him, madam," replied Rose. "'Tis he that has ill-treated and deceived me, and many others, too. He cannot say that I ever affected to love him, that I ever did more than yield a cold and unwilling acquiescence to that which he made me believe, by a shameless falsehood, was my poor father's will. I learned, at length, what that father's intentions really were; and then, contempt and abhorrence of the deceiver took the place of the indifference I before felt towards him. He knows it well," she continued, "that I am bound to him by no tie, no promise, no engagement whatsoever. I was told that I must marry him—"

"And so you must, fair lady," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, in a mocking tone, "and so you must, and so you shall! As sure as my name is Jacqueline de Chazeul, you shall be his wife before two suns set."

"Nay, nay, my dear mother," said Chazeul, who had been speaking to the Count de Liancourt at a little distance, "you are too harsh, and too unkind to Mademoiselle d'Albret. She will yield when she finds that it must be so. She will also yield, when she finds she is mistaken about this contract, and that, in reality, her father left it open for Monsieur de Liancourt to bestow her hand on which of his nephews he thought fit. I can assure you, Rose," he continued, in a soft, but emphatic tone, "Monsieur de Marennes believed that my uncle, here, could bequeath his estates to myself, if he chose it; and, therefore, I might as well be meant by the contract as my cousin."

"Cease, sir, cease," answered Rose; "it is vain to stain yourselves with any more deceptions. I now know the whole truth, that the good commander resigned his claims in favour of Madame de Montigni; that to her son those claims appertained when my father signed the contract, and, therefore, it was to him he pledged me. But I have something more to say, and I beg you will mark it. Had you been even meant by the contract, which you know right well you were not, nothing on earth should ever make me give you my hand, now that I know some other of your doings. I would rather, a thousand-fold, vow myself to the seclusion of a convent, than pass my life with a man whom I can neither respect, esteem, nor love."

"We will not give you the choice, minion," cried Madame de Chazeul; "your

fate is sealed and determined ; you are to be his wife, if not by fair means, then by force. This will bear no further trifling, Liancourt; you must exert your power over her, and compel her to do what is right."

"I hope he will exert it," exclaimed Rose, "to protect me from those who would do me wrong. Monsieur de Liancourt," she continued, "I have always loved you well. You have ever been kind to me, till this last sad occasion, when, persuaded by others, I am sure, rather than by your own inclination, you have well-nigh sacrificed my happiness and peace. For my part, I have tried, from my young days, to show you the affection of a daughter, and I would willingly show you the obedience of one, were it possible; but, in this instance, it is not so. My father's contract I will fulfil, happy that my own inclinations and the earliest affections of my heart go with it, but still more happy that it saves me from wedding one with whom I could expect nothing but misery. I beseech you, then, give me that protection which you promised my father you would afford me; suffer me not to be injured and insulted in your own house, even by your sister; and do not allow me to be persecuted to break the engagement made between you and your wife's brother. Rather, aid to maintain it to the utmost of your power; and be my support and stay in this hour of difficulty and distress."

"You ask much at my hands, Mademoiselle d'Albret," replied the count coldly, "and yet do not offer much in return. You cannot suppose that I approve of your quitting my house with Monsieur de Montigni; and your claim to protection on my part must be founded on your obedience to my commands, which I trust you will now honour somewhat more than you have lately done."

Rose turned away, with a sad look, and sickening sinking at her heart. Every one was against her; and, though it was what she had expected, yet it made her feel more deeply desolate and hopeless. To reply, she saw, was vain; and she felt that she could not much longer keep up the firm and determined tone in which she had forced herself to speak; for tears, at every other moment, were ready to betray the feelings that she laboured to conceal. "I am weary," she said, abruptly, "and I would fain retire to rest. By your leave, Monsieur de Liancourt, I will seek my chamber."

"I will show you which is your chamber," said Madame de Chazeul, "for you must not fancy that you are to tenant a room so easy of access. Who can tell," she continued, in a jesting tone, "what gay gallants we may have in the castle, who may be pleased to

scale a lady's window, when they know she is so ready to receive them?"

Rose could bear no more, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Hush, Jacqueline, hush!" said Monsieur de Liancourt; "I will show her the room myself;" and, taking her hand, he led her away from the hall.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WICKED PLOT.

For one moment—it could scarcely be more—the old Marchioness de Chazeul gazed down upon the pavement of the hall after her brother had left them; and then looking up, with the demon smile which was not uncommon upon her countenance, when anything especially daring and evil was working in her mind, she took her son's arm, and gazing in his face, said in a low sarcastic tone, "Do you know, my son Nicholas, you are but a fool after all?"

"Indeed, sweet mother!" said the worthy offspring of such a parent, with a look of supercilious indifference; "I am glad to hear you think so. Variety is charming in a family; and I have heard men say that you are no fool. But may I know how I have merited the pleasant appellation you so glibly bestow upon me? What have I done, said, or thought, which deserves that ancient and honourable title?"

"You have thought that this girl can be won by civility, flattering, coaxing, and tenderness," replied the marchioness; "and therefore you are a fool, as well as my weak brother, your uncle. It needs but a glance of her eye; it needs but a word from her lip, to show that such means are as vain as whistling to the wind. I tell you, Chazeul, and I tell you true, that force—force—do you mark me? force is the only engine you can employ against this haughty spirit. Ay, and it must be applied quickly, if you would have your bride. She knows more than we imagine—she knows all, that is clear. There is now no stopping in midway. You must overleap all idle barriers; rend to pieces all morsels of black and white parchment. You must render yourself the only man she can marry: and all will be soon yours."

"But what course would you have me pursue, my most politic mother?" asked Chazeul; "if one frightens and alarms her, she will only shrink from me the more."

"Let her shrink," cried the marchioness. "What matters her shrinking, to you? Do

not pretend to things you do not feel. She must be your wife, Chazeul, shrinking or willingly; and which, matters not much, either to you or me. She must be yours, I say; and as it is clear that she will not with her consent, it must be without."

"But how? but how is this to be accomplished?" demanded her son. "Here are a thousand obstacles, good lady. We must work through my uncle, and you must see that it is vain to hope he will use any violent means. How weakly he answered me this morning, when Nemours' trumpet came!"

"We must act through some one else," answered the marchioness. "He is not to be trusted, but when he considers his rights invaded; and 'tis useless to think of employing him. We must find another, and get him to aid our plan."

"But what is that plan?" demanded the young nobleman. "Let me hear in a word what is the purport of all these hints? How is it to be done?"

"By various ways," replied Madame de Chazeul. "First, and above all, you must remove from this busy scene the man whom she fancies that she loves."

"Remove him!" exclaimed Chazeul; "I know not how. He is surrounded by people devoted to him. I should find some difficulty. He is now in the hands of Nemours too, who would not suffer it. The duke is scrupulous in such matters."

Such were the words of Chazeul. He expressed no surprise; he displayed no horror at the proposal; but in those days such thoughts were familiar to the minds of most men. In the preceding reign, private assassination had been one of the means of war, so often really committed by persons high in station and education that rumour as usual exceeded the truth, and no death took place with circumstances at all out of the common course, without being attributed to the agency of man. The revenge of individuals, the malignity of faction, the policy of states, all took the same direction; and kings and princes prompted and paid for dark deeds of blood, as well as the corrupt minions of the court, and the vicious women with whom it was thronged. Each day some murder had stained the records of the country, and men had more cause to guard themselves against the covert enmity of the rival in ambition or in love, than against the open wrath of the acknowledged foe. So common, indeed, had such crimes become, that circumstances were supposed to justify, and custom to palliate, them; and when they were discovered, no wonder or disgust was excited, and multitudes who had taken no part in the deed itself, were found to conceal, protect, and plead for the assassin. It was an age of crime,

Chazeul, then, and his mother discussed the means of removing De Montigni from their path as calmly as if they had been laying out some party of pleasure; there was no hesitation, no repugnance, no tragic movings of remorse. The difficulties were all that were considered and how to obviate them. It was of every-day deeds and events they spoke, and they conversed over them in an every-day tone.

"I do not see," replied the marchioness, "why that should prevent the business. His being in the hands of Nemours but fastens him to one spot, where he can always be reached."

"But there will be guards and people about him," said Chazeul, "who would give him help. To accomplish it, we should need too many men, to be able to introduce them quietly."

"Too many men!" cried his mother with a laugh; "why, you soldiers always are thinking of violence, and swords, and daggers. You do not fancy, do you, that I would have recourse to means so rough? Out upon such coarse handy-work! One little cup of drink—one savoury ragout—will do the deed better than bullet or steel, and put you in possession of Liancourt as well as Marennes. But leave that to me, for you seem unskilful in such matters. You must have both; and your task must be with the girl—leave me the man. We must have no more trifling, Chazeul, or secrets may come out which it were well to hide till you have obtained all that you can desire. The girl must be yours before two days have past—did you not mark her words?"

"I marked many of them," replied Chazeul; "they were well worthy of notice. But which do you mean?"

"Are you so dull?" asked his mother. "Did you not hear her say, that you had deceived others as well as herself? and did not your own mind read the comment? Hark ye, boy! Did you ever see or know a person—a sweet, tender, delicate creature, called Helen de la Tremblade?"

Chazeul's cheek grew pale and then red; not from remorse; not from shame; but from dread. It was dread, however, of only one human being. All the world might have been made aware of his baseness, without causing him a care or anxiety, if he could have kept it from his mother. But he knew her well, the dark and fiendish nature of her character, her remorseless seeking for her own ends, her vindictive hatred of all those who offended her, and the little regard she had for any tie, in pursuit of her own objects. Vanity, vice, and intemperate passions, had not yet altogether quenched every natural feeling in his heart; and some linger-

ing affection for the unhappy girl he had injured, made him apprehensive for her, more than for himself. His mother might use the knowledge she had obtained, to drive him in the course she thought fit, or to frustrate his purposes if he opposed her, but she would do no more as far as he was concerned. The result to Helen, however, might be death, or worse than death; and, for a moment or two, he remained silent, considering how he should act.

The keen eye of Madame de Chazeul was upon his countenance all the time, marking every change of expression, and translating all she marked; but after waiting his answer for some time, she demanded, "You have heard of such a person, have you not?"

"Well," he replied somewhat impatiently, "what of her? What has Mademoiselle d'Albret to do with Helen?"

"Ha, ha, ha," cried Madame de Chazeul, with a bitter laugh. "What has she to do with Helen? Why, simply to tell Walter de la Tremblade that gay Nicholas de Chazeul has made a paramour of his niece, in order to raise a devil that will soon send all our projects flying to the wind. You now see there is no time to be lost. The thing cannot long be kept secret. This girl has got some inkling of the truth, and she must be your wife before she can hint her suspicions to him, and he inquire into the facts."

Chazeul paused, and thought for a moment, and then repeated his mother's words: "The thing cannot long be kept secret!—why not? What have you done with her, my good mother? Something assuredly; for Helen would keep her own counsel. You have not put her to death, surely?"

"Not I," cried Madame de Chazeul. "I am not called upon to punish such sins as that. It's only when people stand in the way that wise men put them to death. There, be satisfied—be satisfied. I have done her no harm; but, as I told you, the thing cannot long be concealed. Rose d'Albret has obtained some intimation of it. Of that I am sure by her manner. The old priest will wonder that his niece does not come hither, for I told him she was ill, or I would have brought her; and he will go to see her, so that I say, it cannot be long concealed. You must use your time, therefore, busily."

Chazeul saw that his mother did not tell him all; but he was well aware that it was impossible to obtain the straightforward truth from her, when she wished to conceal it, and accordingly following the bent which she gave to the conversation herself, he asked, "But how—how am I to use my time busily and to good purpose? I, unaided, cannot force Rose d'Albret to give me her hand. If my uncle would assist vigorously,

we might indeed succeed. But he is timid, as you know, in action, however bold he may be in words; and depend upon it, we shall need strong measures to induce her to yield."

"Ay, strong measures indeed," replied his mother, "but they may be used without my brother's will or consent; and, if you manage matters rightly, you may make the lady less positive than she is at present. Hark ye, Chazeul, a word in your ear!" He bent down his head, and the marchioness whispered to him a few brief words.

"No, no! Impossible," he cried; "utterly impossible! The maid sleeps in the ante-chamber, the priest in the next room. 'Tis quite in vain."

"Why, foolish boy," replied his mother, "I mean no violence—I mean no wrong. You do not comprehend me. Do you not know how much store she sets upon virtue and reputation? She would never consent to carry to Louis de Montigni a sullied name. Let but her fame be in your hands; let us but be able to prove that you have passed the night in her chamber; and we shall have no more idle resistance. The girl Blanchette will give you admittance, and be a witness also. Then keep as still as death for an hour or two, leave something on the table—a glove—a hat—anything, in short, to mark that you have been there, and to show her herself that it is so, without your telling her."

Chazeul paused and meditated. He thought the scheme not unlikely to succeed; and yet he feared to undertake it. If discovered, he knew that it would prove his ruin with his uncle; and he did not see how he could bring it to work upon the mind of Rose herself without acknowledging the truth or more than the truth to Monsieur de Liancourt. Just as he was about to reply, the count himself returned with father Walter; and one of the servants entered at the same time to light the sconces in the hall. Madame de Chazeul held up her finger as a warning to be silent; and as soon as the attendant was gone, the marchioness turned to her brother, inquiring, "Well, what have you done with this obstinate girl, Anthony?"

"In good faith, nothing," replied the count; "she was more mild and gentle than with you; and I left her weeping; but she is as firm as ever."

"Well," said Madame de Chazeul, in an indifferent tone, "if she will not by fair means, she must by force. We have every right to compel her to do that which is good for her."

Monsieur de Liancourt shook his head doubtfully, saying, "I do not know."

"Ah, my good brother," answered Madame de Chazeul in a bitter tone, "a battle lost makes great difference with doubtful friends. What say you, Monsieur

de la Tremblade? Are you for giving up the Holy Catholic Union, and bestowing the lands of Marennes and Liancourt upon a supporter of the heretics?"

"Far from it, madam," replied Walter de la Tremblade. "If anything, this unfortunate defeat should make us more zealous, active, and determined. The party of the League is the party of truth and religion; and doubtless it will ultimately triumph. It should be our part to promote it the more strenuously, as each new obstacle arises; and I must say that, conscientiously, no guardian could bestow the hand of his ward upon a man, who, like Monsieur de Montigni, has drawn his sword against his religion."

"But that is a different thing," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "from forcing her to a marriage without her consent."

"Not altogether," answered the priest. "If you do not compel her to wed the one, she will wed the other; and when she finds there is no escape, most probably her resistance will give way."

Madame de Chazeul watched the countenance of father Walter while he spoke, and listened, well satisfied, to words which showed her beyond all doubt, that neither her own conduct towards his niece, nor that of her son, was ever dreamt of by Walter de la Tremblade. "If we can accomplish this marriage," she thought, "within a few hours all will be safe. He may rage then, as much as he will. It is amusing enough, to make him aid in bringing about that, which he will most wish undone, when he knows the truth."

"What you say is very true, father," rejoined the count, "but I see not what means one can employ actually to force her. As she said to me but now, we may drag her to the altar, but she will refuse the vow, and protest against it in the face of God and man."

"Such things have taken place," said Walter de la Tremblade, "and yet the ceremony has proceeded."

"But then, the contract?" said Monsieur de Liancourt. "If she will not sign it, how can we force her?"

"Oh, leave all that to me," cried Madame de Chazeul. "If you, brother, will only promise not to interfere, except by exerting your authority on behalf of your nephew, and laying your commands upon her to marry him, I will do all the rest."

"But I fear your violence, my good sister," replied the count.

Madame de Chazeul was about to answer, when a servant again entered the hall; and Monsieur de Liancourt exclaimed impatiently, "What now?"

"A messenger is just arrived from Chartres, sir," replied the man, "with orders

for Monsieur de Mottraye, who escorted Mademoiselle Rose back, to return without a moment's delay, as the town is menaced by the king. He brings tidings, too, sir, that a duel has been fought between Monsieur de Montigni and my lord of Nemours."

"Nemours has killed him for a thousand crowns," cried Chazeul, as joyfully as if De Montigni had shown himself his bitterest enemy through life.

"What more? what more?" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "which of them fell?"

"He knew little about it, sir," replied the servant, "for he came away, before the matter had spread over the town."

"I will go and see him," exclaimed Chazeul. "Nemours has killed him without doubt."

Thus saying, he hurried away, and was absent for several minutes, during which time the marchioness talked in a low voice to the priest. But the count remained standing in the middle of the room, with his eyes bent down and his heart sad. He could not but recollect the days that were passed. The boy whom he had brought up from early years, the graces and high qualities he had displayed, and many a little act, and many a little scene, forgotten till that moment, rose up reproachfully before his eyes, and for the time filled him with grief, and with remorse. The voice of conscience, which in its own hour will be heard, told him that the deed was his, that, had he not attempted to injure and deceive his sister's son, all the long train of dark and sad events, which had filled the last few days, would not have happened, that joy, and peace, and mutual love, and kindly affection might have reigned, where strife and evil passion, violence and death, had been introduced, as the black followers of fraud. His brother and his nephew, both were gone in a few short days; and his heart told him, that the virtuous and the good had been cut off, while the dishonest and the vile remained!

It was but during a few minutes, however, that such thoughts oppressed him; for vanity, his besetting sin, the besetting sin of so many, the salve with which the devil medicates all the wounds of conscience, was soon brought to his relief. He was too vain to believe, for any length of time, that he could do wrong, even though the warning angel of the human heart thundered it in his ear. "Had De Montigni done as he was asked," he thought, after he had mastered the first impression, "nothing of this kind would have happened. It is all in consequence of his own obstinacy. What a sad thing it is, that men will not be persuaded to their own good!"

As these comforting reflections passed through his mind, Chazeul re-entered the

hall. "He is dead," he cried, "beyond all doubt he is dead. The man himself saw Nemours come back into the city, alone and uninjured."

"Well, then," said Madame de Chazeul, "we are saved all further trouble; for now you are the only heir. You had better go and tell her the news, Chazeul. Perhaps it may deliver her from as great an embarrassment as any one feels."

"Fie now, Jacqueline! Fie now!" cried the count. "You know not her heart or feelings."

"I know very well, my good brother," replied Madame de Chazeul, "that women, if they have said a thing, often adhere to it with the constancy of a martyr, when they would give their right hand for a fair excuse for changing; but vanity keeps them to the point, with a much firmer sort of resolution than conviction can supply. Do not tell me about her feelings! I know my own sex far better than you do; and I am sure there is not one woman out of ten, who would not rejoice at the death of her dearest friend, if it delivered her from a great embarrassment."

"I find the Church is merciful as well as wise, in imposing celibacy upon its priesthood," said father Walter, with a cold sarcastic smile. "But, indeed, I think it would be better not to tell Mademoiselle d'Albret to-night. She must be fatigued; her mind depressed with disappointment and anxiety; and she should be allowed some time for repose."

"No, father, no!" replied Madame de Chazeul. "She must know it to-night, for the marriage shall take place to-morrow, or, at farthest, the next day. Let her have to-night for grief—for I do not say she will not weep—to-morrow her mind will be made up, and the affair can proceed with decency."

"Will you tell her, father Walter?" said Monsieur de Liancourt.

"Nay," exclaimed the marchioness, "why give him that trouble? I will do it in a moment."

"No, Jacqueline, you shall not go," cried the count. "You are too harsh and fierce to bear such tidings—Go, father, go! It is an office of Christian charity."

"She is more likely to believe it from my lips, than yours, madam," said father Walter, "and therefore I will undertake the task; but I must be quick, for I have my watch to commence in the chapel."

"Let us hear how she bears it," said the Count de Liancourt. "I grieve for the poor girl."

"Pshaw!" cried Jacqueline de Chazeul; and the priest quitted the hall, leaving the marchioness evidently uneasy.

A chamber had been assigned to Rose

d'Albret, higher in the building than that which she had formerly tenanted, and next to the room of father Walter himself. It opened first into an antechamber, somewhat smaller than the other, and thence upon a large landing place, separated from the stairs by a balustrade. The anteroom, as before, was occupied by the maid Blanchette, who, well-warned and tutored, was kept as a spy upon all her mistress's actions; and, on entering this little suite of apartments, the girl was the first person whom father Walter encountered.

She was sitting at a table, knitting, with a sullen brow and pouting lips; and, notwithstanding deep habitual reverence for the priest, she seemed scarcely willing to answer him civilly, when he inquired, if he could speak with her mistress.

"I cannot tell," replied the girl, rising for a moment, and resuming her seat; "I really do not know what she is doing,—she does not want my services, she says; she would rather be alone."

"Go and see, daughter!" said the priest. "Doubtless Mademoiselle d'Albret is grieved and perhaps angry; but that does not exempt you from respect and obedience towards her in all things, where other duties do not require you to oppose her wishes."

"Indeed, father," answered the girl sullenly, "I cannot undertake all this. Here, I am told not to quit her anteroom, from the moment she enters her chamber, till the moment she leaves it, which is making me no better than a prisoner; and then, I am to be rated, and frowned upon by the lady, as if I had behaved very ill to her. I don't see why I should bear all this."

"Because you are ordered to do so," said the priest somewhat sternly; but he added the next moment, "It will not be of long duration, however. Now go and tell her I am here, seeking to speak with her on a matter of deep moment."

Before Blanchette could obey, however, the door of the antechamber opened, and Madame de Chazeul entered, saying, "I have come to tell her myself, good father. I can then better judge of her frame of mind; and, as the count tells me, you have to keep vigil by the body of my poor old brother Michael, which I did not understand before, I will not keep you."

"Nay," replied the priest, "I have time, and will never shrink from doing my duty. This poor child will need consolation, and it must be my task to give it to her, as far as my poor voice can do so."

The marchioness was evidently not well pleased with this reply; and, though she masked her embarrassment as well as she could, yet a certain air of anxiety and uneasiness did not escape the calm but

penetrating eye of Walter de la Tremblade. "She doubts me," he thought. "She is one of those who have no confidence in any one. What must her own heart be like!"

As he thus pondered, Blanchette returned, and bade him enter, which he did, making way, however, for Madame de Chazeul to pass in first.

Rose had been weeping, but her eyes were now dry; and the usual mild and gentle expression was upon her countenance, till her eye lighted upon Madame de Chazeul; and then she turned away her head, with a look of shuddering horror, which the marchioness did not fail to mark, though without less anger than might perhaps have been expected. It was her wish to overawe and to command, both at present and in future, and the age of wishing to be loved had long passed by with her. Rose, however, soon added to the offence; for, turning towards Walter de la Tremblade, she said, "The girl merely mentioned your name, father; and I was willing and even glad to receive you; but the conversation which has already taken place between this lady and myself was not of such a character as to make her society very desirable to me."

"You must have it, nevertheless, pretty minion," replied Madame de Chazeul. "I know you are as ungrateful, as you are self-willed; but I came to break to you a piece of news which has just arrived, and which, as you must hear it sooner or later, we have thought fit to communicate at once."

"The sooner it is communicated the better," answered Rose; "I beseech you to make no delay; for I am anxious to retire to rest."

Madame de Chazeul turned towards the priest with a sign for him to proceed; and father Walter taking up the tale, addressed Rose in a gentle and a kindly tone, saying, "I fear, my poor daughter, what we have to communicate may grieve you more than you expect; and I would therefore have you prepare your mind, by thinking of how God tries all men in this world, with various deep afflictions, making them sometimes His chastisements for errors past, sometimes warnings against future faults, often depriving us of those things most dear which might prove snares to us, often frustrating our most anxious desires, which, if we knew all, might in their gratification produce misery, instead of joy."

Rose listened attentively, anxious to hear what was to come next; but Madame de Chazeul waved her hand impatiently, exclaiming, "You are not in the pulpit, my good father. Do you not see she is quite prepared for anything you have to say? The truth is this, Mademoiselle d'Albret, a messenger

has just arrived from Chartres bringing orders for the men who accompanied you, to return immediately, and with that order they conveyed intelligence that a duel has been fought between Monsieur de Nemours, and your late lover, De Montigni, in which the latter has met with the chastisement which his presumption deserved, and has been killed on the spot."

Rose started up and clasped her hands, while her face grew pale as ashes, and for a moment she seemed about to faint. The next instant, however, she passed her hand across her brow, gazed for a moment anxiously upon the ground, and then suddenly raised her head with a smile full of scorn, while the blood came back into her cheek and lip, exclaiming, "It is false! I know that it is false!"

"The poor creature is mad," said Madame de Chazeul. "You know it to be false, when we know it to be true! You must have wonderfully clever information. The man is in the château at this moment, who brought the tidings from Chartres."

"Let me see him," said Rose d'Albret.

Madame de Chazeul paused, and saw that, by mentioning the messenger, she had committed a mistake; for it was her object to represent the death of De Montigni as certain, and she was aware that her son had run on to that inference, much more rapidly than the man's own account might justify.

"No," she replied, "you shall not see him. I pledge my word that the information is true. Here is father Walter ready to do the same. Monsieur de Liancourt will tell you the like story. If you insult us by doubting our word, it does not become us to take any trouble to convince you."

"Madam, I have been deceived in more than one thing already," replied Rose, bending her head gravely; "and consequently, I do not lend my mind easily to everything that is told me. Father Walter, I beseech you, by your duty to God, by your sacred calling, as you shall answer for it hereafter, to let me know, has this information truly arrived, and is it certain?"

"That it has arrived, is beyond doubt," answered the priest, "but in regard to the certainty or the particulars—not having spoken with the messenger myself—I cannot say anything."

Rose waved her hand. "Enough," she said, "enough; I will beseech you now to leave me. Nay, I can endure no more to-night."

Madame Chazeul was going to add something; but the priest laid his hand upon her arm, saying, "Nay, madam, let us not press upon her hardly. Give her till to-morrow to think over it;" and he led the marchioness away, leaving poor Rose to her meditations,

CHAPTER XXIII.

ROSE'S DANGER.

THE moment the priest and the Marchioness de Chazeul were gone, Rose d'Albret cast herself down into her chair, and covered her eyes with her hands. She would fain have shut out every sight and sound, in order that she might bend the whole energies of her mind to contemplation of that one question—were the dreadful tidings she had heard, true or false? But the agitated beating of her heart, the whirling confusion of her brain, prevented her for a long time from fixing her thoughts firmly upon all the different arguments for believing or disbelieving the tale that had been told her. All was wild, and vague, and indistinct. Apprehension at first was far more powerful than hope; and, though reason pointed out many improbabilities even in that part of the intelligence which, as the reader knows, was absolutely true, yet she still dreaded the worst, even while she resolved, if possible, to believe that all was false.

"Was it likely," she asked herself, "that so proud a prince as the Duke of Nemours, should risk his life in single combat against his own prisoner? Was it probable, that he, who had shown himself so haughty towards De Montigni as scarcely to return him an answer, should place himself in such a position as to be compelled to meet him in the field? Was it not likely, most likely, that such a tale should be invented by those who had already deceived her on other points, in order to lead her the more easily to the objects they desired? Was it not clear that it was so, from their refusal to produce the messenger? Was not, in short, anything asserted by Jacqueline de Chazeul, more likely to be false than true?"

Thus argued hope; but on the other side fear, though in fewer words, spoke with a more powerful voice. "The priest had asserted that the report had undoubtedly arrived. Would he venture to do so, after the solemn adjuration she addressed to him, if he were not himself convinced that what he said was true? Then, too, the pains he had taken to prepare her mind for the tidings, showed care and consideration for her; and, if the language he had used in so doing, were but the preface to a falsehood, it must be blasphemous trifling indeed. She suffered memory to run back over all the events lately passed; she considered his conduct; she asked herself if he had ever been guilty of deliberate falsehood? The answer was, no. He had suffered others to do so; but he had not done it himself. Without telling the exact truth, he had not uttered actual

untruth. With that species of art, which has acquired the name of a body of men famous for employing it in all their dealings, he had made truth serve the purposes of falsehood; and, by a jesuitical juggle, had countenanced things that he knew to be untrue, without leaving those he deceived any means of convicting him of a lie. But now he had boldly and straightforwardly said, that the intelligence had certainly arrived. There was no evading that, she thought; it must either be true or false. She recollected, too, the fierce anger which De Montigni had displayed when first made prisoner by Nemours, and the words and glances which had passed between them in regard to herself. Might not such a scene, she inquired, have been renewed, when her lover found that she had been actually sent back without even being permitted another interview with him? Might he not have used such language as would compel a prince of fiery courage like Nemours to waive the privileges of his rank, and meet him as had been reported. Nemours was known to be daring, chivalrous, and of a character to carry the point of honour to excess; and if they met, was not the result reported to her, likely to take place?"

Thus argued fear; and between his voice and that of hope, her mind was left in that painful uncertainty, which is more wearing and agitating to the human frame, than even grief itself. She was still busy with these thoughts, when the door opened and the maid looked in; but Rose waved her hand impatiently, exclaiming, "Leave me, leave me, I do not want you. You can go to bed."

The very sight of Blanchette, however, brought back to her mind all the arts that had been practised upon her before, and made her once more hope that this sad intelligence might be part of a similar plan. "I will retire to bed," she thought; "in the darkness and stillness of the night, I can think over these things more quietly than now. The sight of that girl is hateful to me. I will shut her out," but when she looked round, she found that the lock of the door between her room and the antechamber, had been removed.

"Ah!" she said, "am I to have no privacy? This is hard, indeed;" and, sitting down, she wept, feeling that she was left alone to struggle with all the arts and machination of a number, amongst whom she had no friend. Rising again, after a moment, she wiped away the tears, murmuring to herself, "But they shall not conquer me. Even if he whom I love be gone, and have left me in this cold-hearted world alone, I can die and follow him; but I will never be the wife of that base and hateful man, let whatever be the result that may." Thus saying, she undressed

without assistance, and retired to bed. But for poor Rose d'Albret, it was no couch of repose. The thorns of the pillow—busy care, and sharp apprehension and bitter grief—banished all sleep from her eyes; and hour after hour she lay turning in her mind the same heavy thoughts which had burdened her since the visit of the priest and Madame de Chazeul.

Daylight returned, at length; and, raising herself upon her arm, she gazed round, as the faint grey stream of early morning poured through the window, and showed the various objects in the room. Then came a warmer tint, as the sun actually rose, and with it some of the thoughts which usually accompany the rising day. How beautiful is the revival of nature from her dark slumber in the arms of night! what an image of the dawning of eternal life to the emancipated spirit after the shadow of the grave! How good, how great, how wise, is the Almighty Author of all, who plants in the seasons, and in the elements, in the changes of the world, and in all the revolutions of nature, the signs and symbols of His beneficence and His power, with promises of love and blessing and protection! There was consolation even in the pale beams of morning; but then came back the sad thought, the bitter, unanswerable question, to the mind of Rose d'Albret—"Do the eyes of Louis de Montigni see, like mine, the return of dawning day, or are they closed for ever in the tomb?" And rising from her bed she knelt, and prayed, and wept, till the increasing sounds in the house told her, that her oppressors were once more waking into active life, and that she must prepare her mind to suffer and resist.

Oh, how most painful of all the many grievous tasks of life, is that of resistance! and yet it is the unceasing lot of humanity; for this is all a battle-field, and at every point—within and without, against ourselves and others, against circumstances, temptations, cares, griefs, fears, pleasures, successes, triumphs, vanity, hope, expectation, pride, disappointment, opposition, regret, and despair; against man and fiends—it is all resistance; and he who would ultimately win the garland of victory, must be armed and awake at every moment of existence. From the moment when the foot of Adam first trod the garden, until the *now* in which we stand against the foe, the conflict has gone on; and happy are they who do resist.

Yet 'tis a weary and a terrible task, especially for those who buckle on their armour for the first time; and poor Rose d'Albret felt her heart sink as she prepared herself for it. But still, the thought of him she loved, and her repugnance to the man who would have injured him, nerved her for the effort; and again and again, she repeated,

"They shall never move me! My voice must speak the falsehood, my own hand must sign my folly, my own heart must prove the traitor, ere they can conquer."

Her knowledge, too, of those with whom she had to deal, was not a little serviceable in guarding her against all arts. That knowledge had come slowly, not by study or inquiry, but sinking in daily into her mind, as act after act, and word after word, developed the characters of the persons who now surrounded her.

"If they have doubts of De Montigni's fate," she argued, "they will urge me to this abhorred marriage with Chazeul at once and immediately; they will give me no time—they may even try threats, and violence, and force. If they have no doubt they will be less importunate; they will allow me to deliberate, to mourn. But, good heaven, if they try force, what shall I do?—It matters not, I will die first. But, by their course, I shall know whether the tale be true or false; and if from their urgency I judge that it is false, I shall gain strength from hope, and courage even from their cruelty. Poor Helen de la Tremblade! They cannot make me as thou art—they cannot add self-reproach to all I suffer, but by my own fault. Would that I had not promised, never to tell her tale, till she herself thought fit. I might perhaps find a friend, if I could do so, in the only one who could well befriend me. She knew not how much her story might serve me now; and I little thought that I should long to tell it for my own safety, rather than for her comfort. But hark, there are people speaking near! I will be dressed and prepared to meet them when they come hither. Blanchette," she continued aloud, "Blanchette!"

The girl made her call several times, and then appeared with a dull and sullen countenance; and Rose proceeding with her toilet, exchanged but few words with one whom she had never either loved or esteemed, and now despised.

When she was fully dressed she advanced towards the door, saying, "I will go out upon the ramparts. Put the room in order against my return."

But the girl planted herself in the way, and replied, "You cannot, mademoiselle. There are strict orders that you remain here, till the count or the marchioness come for you."

There was a low suppressed laugh—a laugh of triumph in her power—mingled with the girl's words, which was hard to bear; and Rose felt at first inclined to resist, and then to weep; but she gave way to neither temptation; and, after gazing at her for a minute, merely replied, "What, I am a prisoner, then; and my own maid the

gaoler? It is well; but it will prove fruitless. Give me a book, I will read."

The girl inquired what book, and gave her mistress the pain—and she well knew it was a pain,—to speak more than once before she chose to comprehend.

At length, however, a book was brought; and poor Rose d'Albret, placing herself near the window, strove to read with an unconcerned air. But it was in vain she did so; the letters swam before her eyes: her mind wandered to other things: her eye ran over the lines without gathering their sense; and, ere she had mastered more than two or three sentences, there was a step in the anteroom, a knock at the door, and before she could say "Come in," Madame de Chazeul entered, followed by Monsieur de Liancourt. The conflict, she saw, was about to begin, and with an anxious gasp for breath, and a haggard eye, she gazed upon them as they approached, unable to speak, though she strove to do so.

"Be calm, Rose, be calm," said Monsieur de Liancourt, placing a seat for his sister, and taking one himself. "I have come to you thus early in the morning, because Madame de Chazeul and father Walter informed me last night, that you entertained suspicions as to the reality of the sad intelligence which we received last night, and I wish to assure you with my own lips that there is no doubt—that I entertain no doubt of the fact."

Rose wept, but could not reply; and after a brief pause, the count proceeded: "Of course I feel deeply grieved that such a fate should have overtaken my nephew; but I cannot help at the same time remembering, that he has not lately acted as became him, nor shown towards me that respect and gratitude which I trust I deserved at his hands."

"Oh, sir," cried Rose, waving her hand mournfully; "touch not the memory of the dead—of one who was willing to show you every reverence, although, perhaps, he might feel that he had been wronged and deceived. To you," she continued, seeing the count's lip quiver, "to you he attributed it not, but to the counsels of others; and you would have found no one more affectionate, no one more willing to testify, in every way, his regard and respect."

"Well, well," cried Madame de Chazeul, "there is no use of disputing about such things. That is all past. The question before us is of the present. You had something to say on that score, brother, I think?"

"Why, simply this," replied the count, "that as my nephew Chazeul is now, without dispute, my heir, he is also, without dispute, the person indicated by the contract between myself and Monsieur de Marennes—as your

husband, Rose!" he added, in a slow emphatic tone.

Rose gazed down and was silent, for her heart beat so violently that she had no power to reply. Had she calculated her whole conduct, however, to obtain an insight into the views of her two companions, nothing could have served her better than that silence, for Madame de Chazeul observed, after a momentary pause, "I am happy to see you make no objections, for no longer delay can be admitted—indeed it is impossible—for the presence of Chazeul is instantly required by the Duke of Mayenne, and you must go with him as his wife."

"Make no objection!" said Rose.

But Madame de Chazeul cut her short, saying, "Ay, and it is well that you do not, for it could have no effect if you did. Everything is determined and prepared. The contract, as before drawn up, waits for your signature, and the marriage must take place at once."

"He is not dead," murmured Rose to herself, with a sudden look of joy passing over her countenance, which those who saw it could in no degree comprehend; and the next moment, turning to Monsieur de Liancourt, she said, "Sir, I will ask if this be decent and proper, in the very first day of mourning for your nephew, for him to whom my heart was given, and my hand promised, to propose that I should wed another?"

"Urgent circumstances, Rose," answered the count, "must justify what would not otherwise be right. The necessity for Chazeul's immediate departure compels us to this course, and I must insist that you make no opposition."

"If Monsieur de Chazeul must depart," said Rose, "let him; he can return at some future period, when a widowed heart may have somewhat recovered from the wound it has received. But it shall not be said, that Rose d'Albret gave her hand to another, before her tears were dry for him to whom her faith was plighted."

"This is all vain folly," cried Madame de Chazeul; "my son will find means to dry your tears, if that be all."

"He can but make them flow more bitterly," replied Rose d'Albret; "was ever such a monstrous and cruel thing proposed! Oh, sir," she continued, turning to the count, "will you, a man of honour and a gentleman, a man of feeling, and of a kindly heart—will you countenance the attempt to force me, the very day after I have heard of poor Louis de Montigni's bloody death, to wed a man for whom I never entertained aught but indifference?"

"Well, Rose, well," said the count, rising; "I will give you another day; that is all

that I can allow; for my word is pledged that, before noon to-morrow, you shall be Chazeul's wife. Nay, say no more, for I will hear no more. Make up your mind to it in the meanwhile; for on this point I am firm, and your conduct in secretly quitting my roof for the purpose of thwarting all my designs and wishes for your benefit, well justifies me in compelling your immediate obedience."

Thus saying he turned and left the room; but Madame de Chazeul remained gazing upon her poor victim with a bitter, and almost contemptuous look, which might well teach Rose to apprehend no very happy life if wedded to her son.

"What is the meaning of all this, girl?" exclaimed the marchioness, as soon as the door had closed upon Monsieur de Liancourt; "you are plotting some stratagem—your delays have some end in view."

"None, madam," answered Rose d'Albret. "The only object that I can have in life is to avoid a union with a man I despise and abhor."

"Despise and abhor!" exclaimed Jacqueline de Chazeul, in a mocking tone; "pray, may I ask how it happens that such passions have found their way into your gentle breast?"

"His own deeds, which have come to my ears in spite of your precautions, madam," replied Rose, "have planted those feelings there, never to be rooted out."

"What deeds?" demanded the marchioness, sternly.

"Unhappily I have promised never to name them," answered Rose; "but you know to what I allude right well; and you cannot doubt with what eyes I must look upon your son."

"You must be his wife, notwithstanding," said Madame de Chazeul.

But Rose could bear no more. "Never!" she exclaimed; "never! Come what may I shall never be his wife. You may drag me to the altar, but not even by silence will I seem to give consent. I will refuse the vow, I will cast away the ring, I will call God to witness that I am not his wife. This hand shall never sign the contract till it moulders in the grave; and if death be the consequence, I will not do one act that can make me his;" and overpowered by her own vehemence, as well as by the many emotions in her bosom, she burst into a bitter flood of tears.

Madame de Chazeul gazed at her for a moment, while her whole face worked with passion, which she could not find words to express; and then shaking her hand at her, she exclaimed, in a low, bitter tone, "You shall!" and quitted the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CHANGE OF STRATAGEMS.

WHEN the Marchioness de Chazeul retired from Rose's chamber, she did not seek the society of her brother; neither did she at first send for her son, nor inquire for the priest. But, as she passed through the antechamber, she beckoned to the maid Blanchette, who had quitted the room when she and the count had entered it, and, with a sign to follow, led the way to her own apartments. When there she seated herself before the mirror, and remained for several minutes in deep thought. She was, as we have depicted her, rancorous and vindictive, but at the same time ambitious and greedy. Nor was she less pertinacious and resolute, than crafty and clear-sighted. No difficulties repelled her, no obstacles were in her eyes insurmountable, no means unjustifiable to attain her ends. Of true religion she had none, though not a little bigotry, strange as such a combination may appear; and, as was the case with many besides herself in that day, she would often scoff at even Almighty power, and set at nought Heaven's vengeance, yet as often gave herself up to penance and austerities, with all the devotion of a saint. But penance never reached the point of interrupting her in the course she chose to pursue. She would mortify her appetites, but not abandon her designs; and, though her formal observance of the injunctions of her church, might show some sort of superstitious dread, the only fear that seemed to affect her in her dealings with the world, was the fear of failure.

It was that apprehension that now assailed her; but, as always was the case with her, all that it produced was fresh efforts to attain her ends, greater exertions to overcome the obstacles that opposed her. The high and firm resolution displayed by Rose d'Albret would have been nothing in her eyes, had she possessed the sole command over her brother's unhappy ward. Her declarations she would have laughed to scorn, and her remonstrances she would not have listened to. For years she had looked upon Rose as a creature that was but to be made subservient to her purposes, the seal to the deed that was to transfer the estates of Liancourt and Marennès to the house of Chazeul, and she regarded even an expression of reluctance as a daring offence. But she feared the effect of Rose's firmness on her brother; she knew him to be weak and irresolute, easily swayed by persons of a firmer mind than his own, violent and hasty by starts, but alarmed and intimidated by resistance; and she doubted much, if Rose maintained her resolution steadily, refused to go to the altar, or to sign

the contract, that Monsieur de Liancourt would use force to compel her, or pass over her resistance and declare the marriage complete, contrary to her protest. There was no scheme, however dark and criminal, that she would not have followed to remove the resistance of her brother's ward; there were no means that she would not have employed, as she herself expressed it, to render a marriage with Chazeul necessary to her honour. But she feared that she might be frustrated if she attempted too daring a project, though that which had presented itself at one time to her mind, had been shortly before carried through but too successfully in another noble house in France, where the most atrocious violence had been employed, to effect an object very similar to her own.

But, though fond of strong and decided measures, Madame de Chazeul was always willing to employ cunning and tortuous means; and she saw no method of ensuring success but by pursuing the plan which she had hinted to her son; and now, as she sat there revolving all the circumstances in her mind, she applied herself to fit so neatly the various parts of her scheme together, that no flaw might mar it in the execution. Blanchette in the meantime stood before her, now bending her eyes upon the ground in assumed modesty and diffidence, now raising them with a furtive glance to the countenance of the marchioness, and striving, but vainly, to read on that dark and puzzled page that which was passing in the still darker and more intricate heart.

At length Madame de Chazeul spoke, in a tone quiet and calm as if no angry passion was a guest in her bosom, saying, "How did Mademoiselle d'Albret pass the night, Blanchette? She seems weary and disturbed this morning."

"I do not know, madam," replied Blanchette. "She sent me away from her quite crossly, and I saw her no more till this morning. Then she was cross enough, madam," continued the girl, "especially when I told her she was not to leave the room till some one came for her."

"And who told you to do that?" exclaimed the marchioness with a look of surprise, "who told you to do that, I say?"

"Why you, madam, ordered me to watch her closely every moment," answered Blanchette; "and so did the count; and how was I to watch her, if she were to go out, wandering all about the château?"

"You are insolent, girl!" cried Madame de Chazeul, "and this is the way, by your impertinent domineering, that you turn the mind of Mademoiselle d'Albret against her friends. You should have watched as if you were not watching; you should have given information to my brother, or myself, if she

went out; and not have presumed to make yourself her turnkey. Who are you, that you should dare to dictate to a lady like that, whether she should go forth or not?"

The maid replied not, but coloured highly and bit her lip, looking down upon the ground with apparently no very placable endurance of the reprimand, which probably she felt the more, as she was fully conscious of having exceeded her orders, at the very time she did so, for the purpose of gratifying her own spiteful nature.

"Well," continued Madame de Chazeul, recovering herself speedily, and remembering that the girl's services might still be needful, "I dare say, you did not err intentionally; but remember to do so no more. You may watch Mademoiselle d'Albret closely, while she is in her chamber: and, if she goes out of it, either give information instantly to Monsieur de Liancourt or come to me. It seems," she added in an indifferent tone, "that the only person she is inclined to see is Monsieur de Chazeul. I shall therefore trouble her no more. When he comes, of course admit him, as the marriage is to take place to-morrow, but no one else,—except, indeed, father Walter de la Tremblade," she continued after an instant's thought—"Monsieur de Chazeul of course whenever he comes,—but no one else;—and remember, Blanchette, have everything prepared to set out to-morrow, about mid-day, both for your mistress and yourself, for you must all sleep at Chartres to-morrow night, and the next day, on to Paris."

There is a dull and heavy-looking sort of personage, amongst the various classes of human beings, by whom the wit and clear-sightedness of the shrewd and the cunning in human character, are more frequently set completely at defiance than even by the politic and the artful. The air of cold indifferent stupidity, which is natural to it, in itself generates an idea of a slow and unexcitable spirit, and an obtuse and inactive mind incapable of strong feelings except of a very animal kind, which not unfrequently deceives the most penetrating. The surface looks so much as if there were nothing below, that we rarely take the trouble of ascertaining the depth and strength of the currents that may be running underneath.

Of this character was the maid Blanchette. She gave no indication of being offended at the censure of the Marchioness de Chazeul, except by the momentary heightening of her colour; and the lady fancied that she had effaced all trace of her harsh words, by holding out the idea of her accompanying Rose to Paris. But it was not so. Blanchette was always displeased with censure, even when, as a humble dependent, she had no

claim, but for services that could be performed by a dozen others, as well as by herself; but, when she had grown a person of importance in her own eyes, by being entrusted with a charge that no one but herself could perform, she felt injured and indignant at the slightest blame, and that of Madame de Chazeul had been neither very gentle in manner nor very temperate in words. She only dropped a profound curtesy then, without making any reply while the marchioness spoke, as if her little wit were busily engaged with other matters, and she was prepared to receive and obey all orders communicated to her without doubt or hesitation. But such a line of conduct was far from her intention; deep and angry passion was at the bottom of her heart; and she determined, if fortune prospered with her, to find some means of retaliating, in act, if not in seeming, the bitter words of the marchioness, without spoiling her own prospects of advancement. She listened then to the end without saying a word; but merely curtesying from time to time, till at length as the lady finished, she replied, "I will see to it all, madam! Everything shall be quite ready."

"Ay, see that it be," replied Madame de Chazeul. "And now, Blanchette, send Monsieur de Chazeul to me if you can find him."

The maid retired, and the marchioness remained turning in her mind the next step to be taken. "Yes," she said, "we may trust the priest,—but not too far. Rose will tell him nothing, thanks to her promise. I wonder how she learned anything to tell. Some letter from Helen doubtless; or else that girl has made herself some friends in the camp of the Bearnois; perhaps has got some new paramour.—I was a fool to deal so harshly with her. What was it to me, if she chose to play the harlot with the boy? My fear of her spoiling this marriage drove me too far.—Yes, we can trust the priest. I have had the castle gates too strictly watched for any one to have brought him tidings without my knowing it. We must trust him, that is the worst—though I do think he would go on, even if he knew all. But his chamber is too near, not to make him a sharer of our plans. These priests are but spies upon us in our own châteaux. I wonder that we tolerate them. Yet they are useful too, when they choose to be serviceable. His zeal for the League will keep him faithful."

Such were some of the half-muttered, half-silent thoughts of Jacqueline de Chazeul, as she sat waiting for her son; but he kept her not long in expectation, for he was anxious to hear the result of her interview with Rose d'Albret; and, as soon as he did appear,

the marchioness greeted him with a gay look, asking, "Well, Chazeul, have you seen your uncle?"

"No!" he replied, "he has not come to the hall. What are your news? What says the little prisoner?"

"Of that afterwards," answered the marchioness. "First, the marriage is to be to-morrow before noon. For that, your uncle's word is pledged, and we must see that he keeps it; for, if this obstinate girl should still resist, he may be shaken. Now tell me, Chazeul, when did her looks first begin to grow cold towards you?"

"They were never very warm," said Chazeul, "but they have been chilly enough for the last ten days."

"Then it is so!" rejoined his mother as if speaking to herself; "that chilliness makes me think that she may love you rather more than less."

"Come, good mother, no riddles," exclaimed Chazeul, "we have no time for solving them; nor am I an *Œdipus*. What is it that you mean?"

"I mean that jealousy has a share in this affair," answered the marchioness. "She has learned your folly with Helen de la Tremblade.—Helen has written to her, or told her; for she saw her about that time."

"I do not believe it," replied Chazeul, "I do not believe it in the least;" and putting his hand to his brow, he thought for a moment, murmuring, "No, no, she would never—"

"But she has, foolish boy," cried Madame de Chazeul. "I know she has, from what this wrong-headed girl said just now. Now mark me well, Chazeul, if you will be guided by me in everything, you will succeed, wed Rose d'Albret, and be one of the richest men in France,—ay, second to none in wealth and power, except the princes of the blood. But if you will not, you will lose her, and with her, not only her estates, but all the wealth that has accumulated, since first she came here as a child."

"Oh, my good mother, I am quite willing to follow your course of policy," replied her son. "No one like a woman for managing a woman. But let me hear first, what she said. Does she believe that De Montigni is dead?"

"Yes, she does," replied the marchioness. "Your uncle convinced her of that."

"Then she is mine according to the contract," said Chazeul. "What did she say to that?"

"Why, at first, she seemed seeking to gain time," answered his mother, "but afterwards, when your uncle was gone, she vowed vehemently, that she would never wed you.—I think not the worse of your case for that, as that is a vow which many a woman

makes and breaks ; but haste is the thing in this case, and her spirit must be broken down ere noon to-morrow, else we may have news, which will overthrow all that we have done. De Montigni may not be dead after all,—he may be wounded,—he may recover. Then what are we to do?—No, we must lose no time.”

“Well, well, but your plan?” said Chazeul. “It seems that my little sins are to be wiped out, the lady’s good favour gained, her unruly spirit broken in, and rendered tractable, all within four-and-twenty hours !”

“And it can be done,” answered Madame de Chazeul. “First then, we must make it seem to the eyes of all men, that you are recovering her good graces. You must appear together. You must hold conference with her, and seem in her secrets and in her intimacy.”

“’Tis telling me to pull down the moon,” cried Chazeul, “or carry away the gates of the castle on my back like Samson. How am I to do all this? If she refuse me audience, withhold her presence, stay in her chamber, and frown or weep whenever we meet?”

“Will it cost you so much to feign a little?” asked his mother.

“Perhaps not,” replied Chazeul, “but what then? Put me on the track, and I will follow it with any one ; but I see not what it is I am to feign.”

“Several things,” replied the marchioness. “First, kindly tenderness towards her, sorrow for her sorrow, sympathy with her distress, anxiety for its alleviation. You may pretend even to enter into her views of delay, affect not to wish to press her, promise to speak to Monsieur de Liancourt on the subject, and with me, and hold out the hope of gaining our consent to your joining the army for a time, and not returning till some months have passed.”

“But if she be so enraged against me,” said Chazeul, “and if she have discovered what you say she has, will she listen to all this?”

“Ay, but that must be one of the first things you soften down,” replied the marchioness, “an obstacle you must remove at once. You must be a repentant sinner, Chazeul ; make vague confession of many faults ; long to atone for them if circumstances would permit it ; and if you can get a tear into your eye, so much the better.”

“I understand, I understand,” said Chazeul laughing. “The tear, I fear I could not manage ; but all the rest I will undertake. I see my way clearly now, but not whither it leads, my dear mother. What is to result from all this? When I have persuaded her that I am penitent, and the most humble creature of her will,—when I have

shown myself whispering in her ear, or walking in tender melancholy with her, side by side, on the ramparts, what is to be done next?”

“Why, what I said before,” replied the marchioness. “Visit her chamber in the night ; leave something there to mark that you have been present. I will have people to witness that you go in and come forth. The girl Blanchette must be taught to swear, that it was with her mistress’s consent and wish. I will indoctrinate her well. Then, to-morrow, early in the morning, I will visit our fair culprit full of reproaches, tell her all the reports that have reached me, of her light wantonness, if needful bring forth the witnesses, and show that, for your honour, for hers, and for your uncle’s, the marriage must take place without delay. We shall have no more resistance then, Chazeul ; and if we have, the tale thus proved, will fix my brother in his purpose of compelling her to yield ; for we must keep our plan as secret as death from Liancourt ; and, if he sees you much together during the day,—if you can contrive to work a sudden change in her demeanour towards you, he will be easily deceived.”

Chazeul mused, and then added, “I will set about it instantly. But I do wish that I had some good excuse for going to her now—something that would make my coming acceptable. She was not in the hall, and may not, perhaps, quit her room.”

“Go to her, go to her !” cried the marchioness. “She is not in the hall, and will not be, unless you bring her forth. It happens luckily that Blanchette, mistaking the order she received, made herself a gaoler over her this morning, and kept the bird in the cage. You can go and open the prison doors. Tell her how grieved you are to hear that such cruelty has been exercised towards her ; declare you will never suffer it ; cast all the blame on me and your uncle ; make us as stern and savage as you will, and shew her she is free, by leading her forth. You can enlarge upon the matter as you will ; and having now the cue, your own wit and knowledge of woman, must teach you to play your part to a nicety.—For me,” she continued, “I must first go sprinkle my old brother Michael’s body with holy water. I can do no less for him, after all the sweet words he has given me through life ; and then I will talk with the priest, and make him share our plans, as much as is needful.”

“Is it not dangerous?” asked Chazeul. “I dread that man more than any other. Calm and staid and thoughtful as he is on the outside, if ever I saw human being full of strong passion, and eager fire within, it is he ; and if he hears aught of this affair with Helen, he will die or frustrate our design.”

"He shall not hear of it, till all is accomplished," replied the marchioness. "I will take care of that. There is not a letter nor a note, be it from some sick farmer's pretty wife, requiring consolation from a kind confessor, that is not brought to me before it reaches his hands. It has cost me more golden crowns, Chazeul, since I came into this château, to secure good friends in the barbican, than would keep a prince's household half a year. However, he must know our plans in part, for fear he should discover them without being told. His consent once given, binds him to our course; so leave that to me, and go you upon your errand."

Without pausing to thank his mother for all her care, Chazeul hastened away towards the apartments of Rose d'Albret. At the door of the antechamber, however, he paused for a moment to consider his proceedings, and then entered with a quick step, demanding in a loud and hurried tone, as soon as he saw Blanchette, "Can I speak with your mistress?"

"Oh, yes, sir," cried the girl, with a low curtesy, and a sweet smile; "you are to be admitted always."

Opening the door, she looked in; and seeing Rose gaze sadly from the window, she threw it wider, exclaiming, without inquiry as to whether the lady would receive her visitor or not, "Monsieur de Chazeul, mademoiselle."

Rose turned a quick and indignant look towards the door, and bowing her head, demanded, "What is your pleasure, sir?—This visit was neither expected nor desired."

"I know it was not, Rose," he replied, assuming a mild and tender tone, in which his voice sounded somewhat like that of De Montigni, awakening memories in Rose's bosom, not the most favourable to himself; "but I have just heard something that would not suffer me to remain indifferent. Shut the door, Blanchette," he added, turning to the girl and speaking in a sterner manner.

"I learn from my mother with shame and anger, Mademoiselle d'Albret," he proceeded sadly, "that they are keeping you here as a sort of prisoner; and I will not suffer such a thing for a moment; for, though it is not my doing, it is on my account. Ill judging friends have done me harm enough with you already. They shall do so no more. I will now act upon my account, and try what the generosity and kindness which I have always striven to display, if I had been permitted, will do with a heart which I am sure is not to be ruled by harshness."

Rose was surprised, but still not deceived; for she contrasted instantly the new tone assumed towards her, with all that had gone before. She recollected, too, Helen de

la Tremblade, and what she had heard from her; and the natural conclusion was, that this was fraud. "I thank you, sir," she said, "and I trust your actions will make good your words. But what am I to conclude from that which you say regarding my captivity here; for I am, indeed, no better than a captive?"

"That it is at an end," answered Chazeul. "I told my mother instantly, that I would not submit to it; and if it were persisted in, I would quit the castle, to the ruin of all her wishes, of my own fortunes—ay, and my dearest hopes."

"Hopes, sir!" said Rose. "Hopes?—Well, I must not be ungrateful, and I thank you for this act at least. Am I to consider myself at liberty then, to quit my chamber? Am I to be no longer gaoled by my own maid?"

"You are free as air," replied Chazeul. "Come this moment if you will, and try; and let me see the man that dares prevent you. But ere we go," he continued with the same soft tone in which he had at first spoken, "forgive me for commenting, one moment, on a word you used just now, or rather on the manner in which that word was spoken. It was, hopes! You seem to think that I did not really hope to win you; or perhaps mean that those hopes were more of your wealth, than your person?"

"How can I think otherwise?" asked Rose, fixing her beautiful eyes upon him. "Is there nothing in your heart, Monsieur de Chazeul, which tells you that it is so?"

"No, on my life," he answered; "but I know what it is you mean, and will admit that you have had good cause to judge as you do. I *am* ambitious, Rose d'Albret, and wealth with me is an object, as the means of ambition. But there may be other feelings in my heart besides, and there are."

"I doubt it not," replied the lady; "but what I doubt is, sir, that those feelings have ever been mine. Perhaps I doubt, moreover," she added slowly, and with emphasis, "that Monsieur de Chazeul may not be inclined to sacrifice the gentle and the better feelings and affections of his heart, at the shrine of that devouring God—ambition."

"It is that I meant," replied Chazeul; "of that I wish to speak. I know you think that I do not love you, that I have not loved you, that I have loved others, that—"

"Nay, nay," cried Rose, waving her hand; "do not enter upon such things, sir. I cannot, must not hear them."

"You shall hear nothing that can offend you," replied Chazeul calmly. "But in simple justice, you must listen to a word or two in my own defence, as you have undoubtedly listened to accusations against me. I do not say that you will exculpate

me, even if I could tell you all exactly as it occurred, which I cannot, which I ought not to do. You would find me faulty, very faulty still. I acknowledge it. I do not, even to myself, acquit myself: I have done wrong, much that is wrong: and many a time when you have seen me grave and thoughtful, it has been when I was meditating how I might make atonement. Yes," he added, seeing a doubtful expression come over Rose's face; "and many a time when I have seemed most light and gay, idle and heartless, it has been but as a cloak to cover from myself and others the bitterness within."

"But how easy"—said Rose, "how easy to make atonement! how easy to do justice!"

"Not so easy as you imagine," answered Chazeul; "for, in truth, it was impossible. I am not attempting, remember always, to exculpate myself: far from it. I acknowledge myself guilty; but some extenuation may be found in many circumstances; in education at a libertine court, in the habits and customs of the day, in the conduct of others, in temptations that I will not give to your ear. Yet I have loved you, and loved you truly; but I see the very mention of it offends you, and therefore I will say no more upon this head. I have set free my heart, and it is enough. Judge of me as you will—harshly if you be so disposed; but still I must have the advantage of my confession in your opinion, and that is something gained."

Chazeul dissembled well: there was a candour, a straightforwardness in his tone which, notwithstanding all that Rose had seen and known, could not but create a doubt of that insincerity which she had always hitherto attributed to him. She could not help blaming, condemning, disliking him; but still her feelings were softened towards him. There seemed to shine out some good amongst the evil; there was something to redeem all that was wrong—something to qualify the darker points of his character. One reason, perhaps, why women so often learn to love men whose whole conduct they reprobate, is that, from glimpses of higher qualities, they are brought, by the easy process of regret, to pity those who give themselves up to unbridled passion, as its slaves rather than its votaries. Not that Rose d'Albret could ever have loved him. There was an innate repugnance between her nature and his, which might slumber while no external circumstances called them into active opposition, but which, when once roused, was sure to burst forth into abhorrence on her side. She could be indifferent to him, she could hate him, as their relative position brought them nearer or more remotely in contact; but she could feel nothing like love. Yet he was the first, the only one

who since her return to the château had spoken with even gentleness towards her; and in moments of danger and distress, there is something that teaches the weaker part of the human race to cling in some degree to anything that offers them support.

Nevertheless, she would not banish the doubts and suspicions which she had such good cause to entertain; and she replied almost coldly, "My opinion of you, Monsieur de Chazeul, must depend entirely upon your own conduct towards me and others. You will acknowledge, doubtless, that the demeanour of all within these walls towards me since my return, has not been such as to conciliate any kindly feeling on my part."

"It has been harsh and cruel," answered Chazeul, at once; "it has been harsh to us both. No choice has been left, either to you or me."

Rose gazed on him in surprise, but he continued, "Do not misunderstand me, Rose. As far as all the affections of the heart go, my choice, my hopes, have long been fixed on one object alone. The choice I spoke of, as what I would myself have desired, was between pressing you in an unseemly manner on subjects repugnant to your whole feelings at this moment, and leaving you to recover from past griefs, ere you are urged to enter into new ties. It is not necessary to relate to you all that has taken place between me and others. I seek not to cast blame on any one; but believe me, if your heart has been outraged, your best affections set at naught, it has not been with my will. Time will clear your eyes of many clouds; and I would fain let time have its effect. You will find, that I have not been so much to blame as you have been led to believe; that matters have been represented to you as certain, that were very doubtful; and that I have suffered some wrong—at least, a bitter disappointment. I seek not to cast a reproach upon the memory of him who is gone; for doubtless, he believed all that he said; but he should have inquired further, ere he attempted to take from me that which I value more than any treasure of the earth. Yet I would not myself now press you to a hasty decision for the world. I know time will be my friend. If you be forced to give me your hand at once, as they have determined you shall be, you will only hate me. Give me time; and, if to win your love be hopeless, I will at least win your esteem."

"Oh, sir! if such be your sentiments," cried Rose, "why do you not join your voice to mine to stop this hasty and indecent proceeding? Why do you not use your influence to avert that terrible moment which we both dread?"

"Because it is in vain," replied the hypocrite; "my influence I have employed,

but to no purpose. When my uncle offers me your hand according to the contract, I must take it, or refuse it. Can I, Rose, can I, feeling as I do towards you, choose the latter alternative? I have already urged him not to force us to such a choice—I will do it again and again, if you but wish it. I will entreat, beseech him, to pause, to wait but till my return from the army. But he has so firmly determined to place our union beyond all doubt before I go, that I fear it will be useless. Some vague doubt, some superstitious fear, of what may take place from delay, seems to possess him; and my mother, I regret to say, encourages him to persevere in his resolution. Yet I will make every effort with both. Only but confide in me, Rose. Want of clear and straightforward confidence between us, has caused too much mischief already. Had you but told me your feelings towards me, had you but informed me of your old affection to another, I might have been grieved, I might have been angry, I might have given way to bursts of rage, it is true; but still, thought would have calmed all down; and much, much that is painful, would have been avoided. But of that no more.—Nay, do not weep—I came to console, and not to grieve you. Come, take the fresh air on the ramparts, before the trumpet sounds; and tell me what you would have me do, and I will do it—I would fain see you use your liberty; for it has pained me to the heart to know the indignity that has been offered you. As we walk, you can speak freely to me; and if by any means I can work your peace, no effort of mine shall be wanting.”

His smooth and deceitful words were confirmed by the manner in which he spoke them. He assumed the air of eager sincerity and truth with wonderful skill; and it was impossible that Rose should not be, in some degrees, shaken in her opinion of him. But nevertheless, she was not altogether deceived. Although she did not see the object to be gained by this sudden change, yet it was too rapid not to startle and surprise her; and there were also, in the whole piece of acting which he now performed, those slight defects, which, good as it was, would have immediately betrayed to an experienced eye, that it was art, not nature, and which, even to Rose herself, all unacquainted as she was with the ways of the world, suggested doubts and suspicions. She saw that he turned quickly from many of the most important points he spoke of, after briefly touching upon them, and had always an excuse ready for not going deeply into any subject which might have most embarrassed him. It was now, that he would not shock her delicacy; now, that he did not wish to cast blame on others; now, that he did not

seek to exculpate or justify himself. In one or two instances these evasions might have been admitted, but they were too frequent; and he also insinuated far more than he said, and more than he might have been able to prove.

It was not exactly that Rose d'Albret marked all these particulars distinctly, but that she received from the whole, joined with her previous knowledge of his character, an indefinite impression of doubt, a fear that he might be trying to deceive her for some purpose which she did not comprehend. Still, as I have said, her opinion of his baseness was in some degree shaken; she thought that, perhaps, he might have better qualities which had been crushed under the weight of evil education and bad example, and which might have led him, had they been cultivated and developed, to higher objects and a nobler course. He was too, as has before been remarked, the only one who seemed inclined to treat her gently and kindly; and she shrunk from the thought of repelling the first sympathy she had met with since her return.

It was with such mingled feelings then, that she replied, “I am most grateful for your kindness, Monsieur de Chazeul; but I must not deceive you. I must not deceive myself. You must clearly understand that my mind is fixed and resolute in the determination which I expressed to your mother.”

“I know not what that is,” replied Chazeul, “for I am not acquainted yet with all that has taken place this morning; but,” he continued, “you must not suppose that I came here to entrap you into any engagements, from which you must naturally shrink. Indeed, my sole object, when I reached your door, was to relieve you from that painful oppression under which you had been placed. I have been led farther than I intended; but I could not make up my mind to neglect the opportunity of removing, at least part of the prejudices which have been created against me in some degree by my own foolish conduct, in some degree perhaps by the representations of others. However, as I said, I came here to entrap you to nothing; and whatever confidence you may think proper to place in me, whatever you may require, or I may do to promote your wishes, or to free you from persecution, such as that which is now mistakenly carried on in my favour, compromises you to nothing, binds you to nothing. Let it be understood between us, that everything, on either side, remains unchanged—I loving you, though perhaps hopeless of return—You retaining every feeling and resolution which time, circumstances, and my future conduct, may not change.”

Rose shook her head gravely and mournfully, but Chazeul went on with a slight

alteration of tone, saying, "Come, Mademoiselle d'Albret, take a turn upon the ramparts, and let us talk no more of such things. The free air and the sight of the country round, will do you good; and, as you get a little more calm, we may consult together as to what is to be done to obviate those proceedings which we both wish to defer, at least."

Rose did not reply, but suffered him to lead her forth, though not without some reluctance. The maid Blanchette, who was in the anteroom, gazed at them as they passed, with a look of some surprise; but she said nothing, and they went out unobstructed.

Through the rest of the day Chazeul maintained the same conduct, and kept up the same tone, frequently discussing with Rose d'Albret the means which were to be taken to shake the determination of the Count de Liancourt and Madame de Chazeul. Three times he went to speak with them alone upon the pretence of inducing them to change their resolutions, and returned with a gloomy and dissatisfied air, saying, "I can obtain no answer, but that to-morrow, before noon, our fate must be decided."

What was really the matter of his conversation with his mother and the count? Very different from that which he represented it. With his mother he laughed merrily over the artifices which he practised. "Ah, give me a woman," he cried, "for seeing into a woman's heart. I have all along mistaken this girl's character. From her light indifference and coquettish gaiety, I had thought to deal with her in the same way; but now I find, that she is all sentiment and tenderness, forsooth. If I had before possessed a clue to the little labyrinth of her heart, I should have easily found my way in."

To the Count de Liancourt, he maintained a different tone; pointed out the apparent terms of confidence which existed between Rose and himself; represented her reluctance as, in the main, affected, and merely assumed out of respect for what she considered propriety; insinuated that she would be rather pleased than not, to be the apparent victim of compulsion, in a matter where her own inclinations and her respect for appearances were at variance; and he took care to confirm the impression thus produced, by drawing from Rose replies in a low voice, to whispered questions which he affected to wish withheld from the ear of the count. Thus passed by several hours at different times of the day. But during the rest, Rose remained in her chamber, plunged in deep reveries, and puzzled and doubtful reflections, seeking some light in the maze that surrounded her, often looking to the future with a shudder of dread, and often contemplating the past with bitter tears, but

still hearing a voice that whispered, "De Montigni is not dead."

CHAPTER XXV.

BLANCHETTE HESITATES.

POOR Rose d'Albret was like an inexperienced youth, playing for a high stake against a numerous party of unprincipled gamblers. While Chazeul was affecting to be her own partner in the game, his mother, as his confederate, was employing all her art against her. During the whole of that day, the marchioness was busy in every part of the château, preparing all means for the attainment of her object. Now, she was dealing with her weak brother, now with the servants, now with the priest; and it was with no cold and lifeless calculation that she acted, but even with more interest than the mere promotion of her son's views could have inspired. She was in her element; she loved the exercise of her cunning; she took a delight in the act; it gave her excitement, in which to her was life; for all her days had been passed from very early years, either in the fine workings of intrigue, or in stormy passions and the struggles of the mind. Such things were to her as the strong spirit to the drunkard, or the dice to the gamester; and she could not live without them. We shall only trace her course, however, as far as this day is concerned, through one or two of her proceedings; for that will be enough to show how she conducted the whole. As soon as her son had left her in the morning, she proceeded to the chapel of the castle, and there, according to the expression of the day, gave holy water to the body of her brother. It may be asked if the sight of the coffin and the pall produced no effect upon her mind; if the salutary thoughts of death, and the evidence, of how all vast schemes and laborious efforts must terminate—of the great consummation of earthly ambition—did not create doubt and hesitation, awaken remorse, or excite repentance? Not in the least! Those were strange and awful times, when the daily scenes of blood and death, and the constant spectacle of vice and crime, seemed to have hardened most hearts against all the great moral lessons which mortal fate affords to the living and the light. They did not—perhaps they would not—feel; and the most frenzied licentiousness, the most guilty schemes, the most black and terrible crimes, had often, for witnesses, the dead; for pretexts, religion; for a banner, the cross.

What she went to perform was but a ceremony; and as such she treated it, without one thought but, "We must get the body buried before the marriage, to-morrow.—No need to tell her anything about it."

She was turning to leave the chapel, when the priest entered, and approached her with a slow and solemn step. "Ah! good father," cried the marchioness, as soon as she saw him, "I have been looking for you. I wished to speak with you about the conduct of this obstinate girl. She still holds out pertinaciously, and something must be done to overcome her headstrong opposition. We have thought of—"

"Not here," replied the priest, interrupting her, "not here! This is a solemn and a holy place, unfit for worldly discussions. Let us go somewhere else, where we can talk over the affair more decently. The lower hall was vacant as I passed through."

"Well, well," cried the marchioness with a smile, not altogether free from scorn, "there, as well as here."

"Better!" said the priest, leading the way back to the château itself. When they had reached the lower hall, as a large stone paved chamber on the ground floor was called, father Walter was the first to resume the subject; saying, "I thought you would fail in persuading her. Monsieur de Liancourt must use all his authority."

"You know him, father!" answered Madame de Chazeul. "It is upon such occasions that he always fails his friends. Bold till the moment of action comes, he is as timid as a hare when it is most necessary to show firmness."

"Not when he can be made angry," replied the priest, "or when he can be convinced that his own dignity is at stake."

"But on this point, neither of those cases can occur," said the marchioness. "She will weep and entreat, and then both his dignity and his weakness will take her part. There is but one way before us," she added, in a low and confidential tone, "and that is, to convince her, that her own fame and reputation require her marriage with Chazeul."

"That may be difficult," answered father Walter thoughtfully; "but yet with time it may be done. We may surround her with nets from which it is barely possible for her to escape; and continual importunity does much with woman, as you, lady—"

"Time! Time!" cried Madame de Chazeul impatiently, "but we have no time. That is the very thing that is wanting. The marriage must take place to-morrow, before noon.—That is decided. It shall be if I live!"

"Nay, but why such haste?" asked the priest. "With no further any obstacle but a young lady's reluctance, it were well worth

while, to give up a few days to the task of vanquishing that."

The marchioness gazed at him for a moment with a glance half angry, half doubtful, and then repeated his words, "No obstacle!—Hark ye, Walter de la Tremblade," and she whispered in his ear, "De Montigni is alive and well!"

Father Walter heard the tidings with a calm sarcastic smile, answering, "I thought so, my daughter. But were it not better to have owned this to me, at once? Such want of trust in those on whose prudence you can rely, has marred many a fair project, and will mar many another. De Montigni lives!—Then you must be quick, indeed!—Not that I bear the young man an ill will: not that I would injure him in anything; but if we can by any means prevent it, he must not carry to the heretic party he has espoused, such estates as would centre in his person by his marriage with this lady. Now, madam, what is your plan? for you have one already contrived, I see."

The marchioness laughed. "Did you ever know me without a plan?" she asked; "but my present scheme is somewhat difficult to explain. However, do you not think, good father, that things might be so contrived, as to render, in a marvellous short time, a wedding with my son Chazeul, a very good and expedient thing in the eyes of Rose d'Albret herself?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the priest after a moment or two of consideration. "You would use no violence? You would not—surely you would not do her a bitter wrong?"

"Oh, no!" cried the marchioness, "but simply by means and contrivances, which I well know how to manage, make her believe that her fair fame is lost, if she do not marry Chazeul. Luckily, he has a goodly reputation as a bold and successful lover, and so the matter will have every appearance of truth."

"But can you ever clear a fame once clouded?" asked the priest; "can you remove the black plague-spot from the fair name which you have stained? Alas! lady, in this world, every idle tongue, every vain, licentious man, every rancorous woman, can blast the reputation of the good and bright, even by a light word; but where is the power that can restore it? Foul suspicion still whispers the disproved lie in the ear of the credulous multitude, and human malice receives it with delight, and propagates the scandal with busy pertinacity. Will you thus destroy the good name of your son's wife?"

"Only to make her his wife!" replied Madame de Chazeul, "only to herself;" and she proceeded to detail her plan, not sincerely,

indeed, not fully ; for she was one of those who can deal in complete sincerity with no one ; but the priest knew her well, and gathered that which she did not tell, from that which she did. His brow was doubtful and gloomy, however, and he asked, "And yet no violence?"

"None, none!" cried Madame de Chazeul.

"Well," he said, after another long pause, "perhaps it is the only way to obtain her acquiescence. Yet I love not such plans ; and am glad that I myself am to play no part in the affair."

"But should you hear or see Chazeul," asked the marchioness, "you will take no notice?"

"I shall neither hear nor see him," replied the priest, "for I keep vigil in the chapel by your brother's corpse, according to my promise, until matins."

"That is fortunate!" cried Madame de Chazeul ; and then she added, lest he should put his own interpretation on her exclamation, "I mean, that you will be thus freed from all personal knowledge of the business."

"True!" he answered, "true! and I would fain know as little of it as possible.—I must now go and say mass, lady.—The count, I trust, will be present; though, to speak truth, this house is more like a Huguenot dwelling, than that of a zealous Catholic, so sadly are the ordinances of religion neglected;—but in the course of the morning, I will find a moment to speak with him, and strive to confirm him in his resolutions."

"Do, do, good father!" replied the marchioness, and left him, not altogether satisfied with herself for having given him any insight into the scheme, of which she was now full.

Blanchette was the next person she practised on ; but to her she afforded no intimation of her intentions, leaving her son himself to deal with the maid. But she prepared the way for him, by many an artful hint of the necessity of Blanchette's pleasing him in everything, both before and after his marriage with her mistress, giving her to understand, that her fortunes depended entirely upon his favour, and that if that were maintained, they were secure.

Blanchette listened, and promised to be most obedient ; but she clearly saw that there was some ulterior object, to be explained at an after period ; and she waited impatiently throughout the day, to learn what it was, hoping to find in it a source of profit to herself. Towards night, her friend, the confidential servant of Chazeul, called her to his master's chamber, and she remained with him in close conference for more than half an hour. When she came out, notwithstanding the obtuseness of her

mind, and the air of still greater dullness which she somewhat affected, it was evident that the girl was a good deal agitated and even alarmed. She went back with a hasty step to the room in which she slept, stopped for a moment in the middle of the floor, then turned and went out again and knocked at the door of the priest's room, which, as we have before shown, was adjacent to that of her mistress. There was no answer ; and hurrying down, she asked some of the servants whom she met below, if they could tell her where Monsieur de la Tremblade was to be found.

One replied that he was in his own chamber ; but another exclaimed, before Blanchette could tell the first that he was mistaken, "No, no, Ma'mselle Blanchette, he is in the chapel," and the girl hurried thither at once. Crossing herself with holy water from the bénitier at the door, and making due genuflexions as she advanced, Blanchette approached the altar, gazing with a look of distaste, and even fear, at the bier of the old commander as she passed.

The priest was just concluding some one of the many services of the Roman Catholic Church ; and the girl waited till the last words died away upon his lips, and then with lowly reverence drew nigh.

"What is it, Blanchette?" said Monsieur de la Tremblade ; "you seem alarmed and in haste."

"I want to know what I am to do, father," said Blanchette in a low tone. "I am sure I do not know, whether I ought to consent to what Monsieur de Chazeul wishes or not."

"Hush," said the priest. "Come into the confessional ;" and, placing himself within the old oak screen, he bent down his head, while Blanchette kneeling on the other side of the partition, poured, through the aperture, her tale into his ear.

The priest listened without surprise, as she told him that Monsieur de Chazeul had required that admission should be given him to her mistress's chamber, at an hour after midnight. "He assured me," the girl said, "that it is with Mademoiselle d'Albret's consent, but that she did not like to mention it to me ; and he added, that I was not to speak of it to her."

"That was not right, for, I believe, it is not true," replied the priest. "But what you have to do, is to ask Madame de Chazeul, and follow her directions."

"Oh, if I am to do that," cried the girl, "she bade me already do everything that Monsieur de Chazeul told me ; but I thought it right to come and ask you, father, that I might be quite sure of what I was about."

The priest paused and hesitated ; but, after several minutes' thought, he replied,

"I know not the circumstances, my daughter. Doubtless Monsieur de Chazeul has no evil intentions." And thus saying, he rose and quitted the confessional, leaving Blanchette to draw her own deductions and follow her own course.

The girl paused and pondered thoughtfully for several moments; then shrugging her shoulders, she murmured with a low laugh, "Well, if he sees no harm in it, what business is it of mine?" and, with this comfortable reflection, she returned slowly to the château.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HELEN AND HER UNCLE.

It was near midnight; all was quiet in the château; sleep seemed to have fallen upon all eyes but those of the sentries upon the walls. The wind sighed amongst the towers and pinnacles; the old oak paneling creaked; and every now and then the screech-owl whirled with its shrill scream past the windows; but those were the only sounds that disturbed the deep silence of night; while the priest, in the chapel, watched the body of the dead man, according to his promise. The building itself was dark and gloomy; the tapers on the altar cast their rays but a little distance beyond the coffin; and the light faded away gradually into the deep obscurity of the other parts of the chapel, while the large cluster pillars and the rich, sculptured groins of the arches, caught the beams faintly as they darted towards the vaulted roof, or strove to penetrate the aisles. It was a solemn scene, and might well fill the breast with thoughts high and grave. There lay the dead; the dust ready for the earth, the spirit returned to God who gave it. There stood the altar, raised for the worship of that God, and bearing aloft in the full light, the symbol of the salvation which was purchased by the blood of His Son. Death, immortality, and redemption, were prominent and clear before the eye, while all around was obscurity, like the misty darkness of mortal fate which wraps us, in this strange world wherein we live.

Father Walter had watched through the preceding night, and had felt less than he did at present; he had done it as a duty, as the mere fulfilment of a promise. He was familiar with the death-bed, the coffin, and grave; and as usual, they had lost much of their impressiveness. But now for some reason,—perhaps that his own heart was not well at ease,—he felt sensations of awe and

gloom creep over him. He knelt and murmured prayers before the altar; he went through some of the ceremonial observances of his religion; but they now gave him no relief. The words fell cold and meaningless from his lips; the sign of the cross, the genuflexion, and the counted beads, seemed for the first time all dull forms, having no reference to the heart.

Then he came forward and gazed upon the coffin; and memory recalled many an event connected with him who now lay so still within. He had known him for many years: he recollected him in his youth, and in his prime, and memory ran back over the long chain of linked hours, pausing here and there upon the brighter spots, till the natural affections of the heart—which not even the cold philosophy of a religion which bars its priesthood from all the more kindly associations of human life, can ever totally extinguish—were reawakened by the thoughts, and some of the fresh and generous impulses of earlier years rose up, and brought a tear into his eye.

Again he knelt down and prayed; but it seemed that, in the act of prayer, a voice from the cross above the altar reached his heart mournfully and reproachfully. He thought it asked him if, in the counsels he was giving, if in the deeds he was sanctioning, he was a true follower of the guileless and holy Saviour, of the pure, the true, the meek, who showed God to be truth and love, and falsehood, deceit and wrong, to be the offspring of the arch enemy. He covered his face with his hands as if the All-seeing eye were more especially upon him; and then starting up he murmured, "I wish I had taken no part in this." With a quick and agitated step, he paced the nave of the chapel; and, as he did so, half-spoken words betrayed the troublous anxiety of his soul.

"I wish I had not done it," he said. "Who can tell what may be the result? They are not to be trusted,—neither mother nor son,—dark, dark and deceitful! Even to me they cannot be sincere. De Montigni is an angel of light compared to them. Would to heaven he had not embraced the party of the heretic!—and this poor girl, why should she be tortured so? Can I not stop it even now?—He is to go thither at one o'clock.—What may be the result?—No, no, he will never dare!" and with agitated pace, again he trod and retrod the whole length of the chapel; and then, after pausing and gazing once more upon the coffin, he suddenly turned, and opening the great door, issued out into the court. Entering the house, he crossed the stone hall, passed through the corridor beyond, and approached the foot of the staircase which led to his own apartments, and those of Mademoiselle d'Albret.

But there he paused; and, laying his hand upon his brow, mused for several minutes.

"No," he said at length, "no, not now. I will return at the very time;—and yet I must not stop him," he added, after a moment's pause. "It seems the only chance for insuring this vast property to the side of the Holy Catholic League. That should be the first question; and yet,—" he paused again, and with a slow step, stopping more than once to consider, he found his way back to the hall, into which the moonlight was streaming through the open door. On the steps he stood for several minutes, gazing up towards the sky, where the faint twinkling stars looked out, like angels' eyes watching the slumber of the world. He thought they might be so, or, at least, that eyes as clear and bright, though hidden from his view, might be even then hanging over him, and all whom that place contained, and he exclaimed, "Oh may they protect, as well as watch!" and, with a slow step, and his looks bent upon the ground, he advanced once more to the door of the chapel.

One side of the building rested against the outer wall which surrounded the château; and the sentries passed it on their round above. Thus when the priest approached, he heard a step like that of an armed man, but he did not look up at the sound, though it was not unpleasant to his ear; for the feelings that were in his heart, and the thoughts which were hurrying through his brain, rendered the proximity of some human being in the dead hours of the night, rather a relief to him than otherwise.

Passing on, however, at a very tardy pace he entered the chapel; and, when he had reached the first column of the six which, on either side, supported the roof, whether there was some noise which roused him from his reverie, or whether there was one of those vague and undefined impressions on his mind, which we sometimes receive without knowing how, that he was no longer alone in that dark and gloomy place—he suddenly paused and raised his eyes; when, between the coffin and the altar, in the full light of the tapers which stood upon the latter, he beheld a human figure, standing with the head bent down, and the hands clasped together. It was that of a woman, young and apparently beautiful, dressed in black garments, but with the head bare, and the glossy hair reflecting the beams from the altar, so that for an instant, to the dazzled eyes of the priest, there seemed a sort of glory round her brow.

He started, and his heart beat quick as, for an instant, he gazed in silent wonder; but his heart beat quicker still when, recovering from his surprise, he recognised the

beautiful form and features of Helen de la Tremblade, his niece.

She had been to him as a child, from her earliest years. On her had centred all the affections which he yet permitted to have any power over him; and, as they were few and confined but to one object, they were strong and vehement in proportion. So vehement, indeed, were they, that at times they alarmed him. He fancied it almost sinful, vowed for ever to the service of his God, so to love any mere mortal creature. Often did he deny himself the delight of seeing her for weeks and months together; and sometimes, when he did see her, he would put a harsh restraint upon his tenderness, and seem cold and stern, though at other times it would master him completely, and he would give way to all the deep affection of his heart.

He gazed on her then, as she stood there, with surprise and alarm. He had been told that she was ill; and her face, as he looked upon it, was deadly pale. She moved not, though she must have heard his step; not a limb seemed agitated. He could not even see her bosom heave with the breath of life. A cold thrill came over him, as with feelings common to every one in that day, he asked himself, "Can it be her spirit?—Helen," he said, "Helen!"

A convulsive sob was the only reply; but that was enough; and, advancing with a rapid step, he passed the bier, and stood before her.

With her eyes still bent down upon the ground, with her hands still clasped together, Helen sunk down upon her knees at his feet. The old man stretched forth his arms to raise her, but she exclaimed vehemently, "Do not touch me! Do not touch me! I am unworthy that a hand so pure and holy should be laid upon me!"

Walter de la Tremblade recoiled for a moment, and gazed upon her with a look of mute and stern inquiry; but then, moved and softened by all the agitating feelings of that night, the full flood of tenderness and affection swept every other emotion away; and casting his arms round her, he pressed her to his bosom, crying, "Whatever be thy faults, thou art my dead brother's child, thou art my own nursing lamb, and woe to any one who has injured thee!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

HELEN'S RESOLUTION.

As nature in the colours with which her beautifying hand has adorned the creation, for the glory of God, and the delight of His

creatures, has far excelled in richness, and brightness, and variety of hues, all that the art of man can produce, merely leaving to his vain efforts the task of falsely imitating her; so does she, in the real course of events, far exceed in the marvellous and extraordinary, anything that imagination can conceive. The boundless springs of human passions and prejudices; the endless variety of human character; the infinite combinations which man and circumstances may afford, are every day offering more wonderful and striking scenes than the boldest poet would venture to display. There is not a house in the land but has its tragedy to tell; there is not a chamber that has not been stained by bitter and passionate tears; there is hardly one human heart that has not within itself its own tale of romance. But as it is the object of this history, but to depict events very ordinary in the days to which it relates—and as it is, indeed, the object of its author in all his works, to keep to calm and quiet probabilities, in order, if possible, to cure his fellow-countrymen of that longing for over excitement, that moral gin-drinking which has become a vice amongst us, and teach them that there may be both pleasure and health in less stimulating beverages; he is anxious to explain every event as it took place, and to leave nothing to the charge of the marvellous.

The reader has already inquired, how happened it, that Helen de la Tremblade, after taking the firm resolution of doing that which, though bitterly painful to her own feelings, she considered a duty to those who had shown her kindness and tenderness in her moment of distress, did not present herself before her uncle on the first night of his solitary watching by the corpse of the old commander, De Liancourt?—and, had I been reading the work, instead of writing it, I should have asked the same question too. The answer is very simple, but it requires some detail.

On the day following the battle of Ivry, hasty preparations were made for conveying the body of the dead leader to Marzay. All those sad and solemn preparations which are required by custom in consigning the mortal dust to the earth from which it came: the coffin, the bier, and the shroud, were to be made ready; and, whatever diligence was employed, it was known that all this could not be complete before evening. The soldiers who had followed the old leader to the field, determined to take their turns in carrying him back to his last home; and Helen, as has been said, resolved to accompany them; but still, during the day, she showed some signs, as it seemed to Estoc, of irresolution and doubt, and the good old warrior determined to speak a word to her, for the

purpose of removing her hesitation. She had not quitted for more than a few brief moments the chamber of the dead man, and the attachment which she displayed to even the inanimate remains of his dead friend, deeply touched the heart of one who, for years, had evinced towards the good old knight, that strong and pertinacious love, so often found in the one-affectioned dog, so rarely in many-motived man. Even had he not promised, he would still have been a father to the poor girl, on account of her devotion to one who had been a father to him; and, as he entered the chamber where she sat, he strove to smooth his somewhat rough tone, in order to speak to her tenderly.

"Come, young lady," he said, "you had better really go into the hall and take some refreshment. We must all die, old and young; and, as the gamblers say, every year that goes makes the odds stronger against us; so there is no use sitting here pining by yourself; and I hope we shall be able to march in a couple of hours."

"So soon!" asked Helen.

"Ay," answered Estoc, "the sooner it is all over, the better, my dear. I know it is painful to you to fulfil your promise, but I don't think you will shrink from it."

"Oh! it is not that," cried Helen de la Tremblade; "my mind is made up; and if it kill me, I will do it. But I did not want to go just yet, for the first person who was kind to me, and took compassion upon me, promised to come or send after the battle was over. He will think me ungrateful if I go, without waiting to see him; and yet who can tell whether he be dead or alive? I am sure he is not a man to shrink from any danger, but rather to seek it; for the kindest-hearted are always the bravest."

"That's very true," exclaimed Estoc. "I have marked that through a struggle of fifty-four years with this good world.—But what is his name, young lady? We have had accounts this morning of all the great men killed and the wounded; so I can tell you if he be amongst them."

"Oh, he is a man of no great rank," answered Helen. "A very poor French gentleman, he told me: his name is Chasseron."

"Oh, he is quite safe and well," answered Estoc, with a smile; "I know him a little, too. But Monsieur de Chasseron is a very busy man, and has many things upon his hands, just now. He is at Mantes with the king, or at Rosni, some say. I wish to heaven I could see him myself," he continued, "for I think if he heard that Monsieur de Montigni and Mademoiselle Rose had been taken by the enemy, he might give us some help."

"Can I not go to him at Mantes?" cried

Helen ; " I could tell him all, and be back very soon."

Estoc paused, and thought. " Not before we set out," he replied. " It's a long way to Mantes, my dear. If you do, you must join us by the way. But how am I to get you thither, and back again ?"

" Oh, I am a poor friendless creature," cried Helen de la Tremblade, " it matters not what becomes of me. I do not think any one would injure me, but that cruel woman ; and she is far away."

" No, you are not friendless," exclaimed Estoc warmly ; " and never shall be while I live. No, I cannot let you go alone ; but I can send two of my old fellows with you who will take care that no one does you wrong. Perhaps there may be some bands too going down, and if I could find any stout old leader whom I know, he would take care of you. I will go up to the village and see ; for it would be a great thing, indeed, if you could let Monsieur de Chasseron know all that has happened. He might help us—he might help us, though I don't know if he has the power."

" I am sure he will if he can," cried Helen, " for he has a kind and generous heart, as I have good cause to say."

" Well, I will go, I will go," replied Estoc.

" At all events, you shall have two men to go with you. Old Jaunaye and Longeau, they shall be the men. They are of the good old stuff, out of which we used to make soldiers in my young days ; none of the coxcombs that we have at present. But, you get ready to go, and I will be back in half an hour. My horse is saddled at the door."

Thus saying, he departed, and, in less time than he had mentioned, returned, with an eager air, exclaiming, " Quick, quick, Mademoiselle Helen ; here is the band of the old Count de Ligones, just marching this moment, and you can easily come up with them. I saw him, and told him, and he says he will take care of you. But you shall have Jaunaye and the Longeau, to bring you across to us to-morrow. You can easily catch us up, either at Tremblaye, or Châteauneuf, for we must needs go slow. The men are ready."

" And so am I," answered Helen, " but how am I to find Monsieur de Chasseron in all the bustle and confusion of the court ?"

" True," said Estoc thoughtfully : " you may have some trouble. I will tell you what," he continued ; " here, write down upon a piece of paper the gentleman's name, and send it into Monsieur de Biron. He is an old friend of Chasseron's, I think, and will bring him to you."

Pen and ink were soon procured, the name written down, and Helen de la Tremblade

covering herself with the thick veil which Rose d'Albret had left behind—for she herself had been driven forth all unprepared—went out, and with the assistance of Estoc, mounted a pillion behind one of the men. After riding for about three miles, they overtook the band of the Count de Ligones, an old soldier of near seventy years of age. He was hearty and gay, however, and would fain have entertained his fair companion for the rest of the way, with many a jest, and many a tale ; but Helen, as the reader may suppose, remained grave and sad, answering his questions by a monosyllable, and listening to his jokes without reply.

" You seem very silent, mademoiselle," said the old gentleman, at length ; " I am afraid some misfortune has happened to you."

" I have lost a kind and generous friend in this last battle," cried Helen de la Tremblade, " and have no heart to speak."

" Ah ! poor thing," said the old man. " You are not a soldier to bear these things lightly. We learn to weep for a friend one half hour, and to laugh the next. When a man holds life by the tenure of a straw, he soon gets to look upon the loss of it by others, as a matter of little moment. Yet here I am, have reached seventy years of age, and have been in twelve stricken battles, with at least a skirmish every week for this last thirty years, and never got but one scratch upon the face : yet I have seen many a blooming boy swept away in his very first fight."

Thus he continued talking on, during the whole way, till they reached the woods, which, at that time, skirted the banks of the Seine ; and, giving his men orders to halt at one of the neighbouring villages, he rode on with Helen and her two companions, followed by a small party of his own attendants, towards the Château of Rosni, in which they found that the king had taken up his abode.

It was the bustle of a camp, rather than that of a court, that Helen now found. Tents were pitched in the meadows ; baggage-waggons encumbered the ground, bodies of soldiers were moving here and there, and parties of armed men with their steel caps laid aside, were seen supping on the damp ground under the trees, by the light of the fires which they kindled to keep off the exhalations of the night, now drawing in around them. The great doors of the château were wide open, the hall filled with people ; and though the Count de Ligones acted as her spokesman, and inquired of several whom they met, if they could tell where Monsieur de Chasseron was to be found, whether in the château, or in the village, she could get no satisfactory answer of any kind ; and, indeed, so busy did every one seem with his own thoughts, or his own business, that very often no reply was returned at all.

As every one seemed at liberty to come and go, however, the old count, more accustomed to such scenes than she, led her up the great staircase into the corridor at the top. But, as they were turning to the right, more at a venture than by choice, a guard placed himself before them, saying,—“You cannot pass, sir, without an order. These are the king’s apartments.”

“Call a valet or an equerry,” said Monsieur de Ligones.

The man obeyed; and, in a moment after, out came a tall good-looking man in military attire, who exclaimed at once, “Ah! Ligones, is that you? You are to quarter your men at the farther end of the village. There are two houses marked for you; but, good faith, you must make them sleep as close as pigs in a sty. We only give them house room at all, because we know that there is not a man under seventy amongst them, and so take care of their old bones.”

“Thanks, Aubigné, thanks,” replied the count; “but I want to see the king, and—”

“You cannot see him just now,” answered Aubigné, “for he has got D’O and other vermin with him, and has for once lost his patience. I heard him swearing like a Reiter, with all the language of Babylon come back upon him in full force. I believe he will frighten them into disgorging something; but whether or not sufficient to carry us to Paris, I doubt. However, if you will wait half an hour, the fit of blasphemy and finance, will have left him. May I ask what are your commands, madam? If your business be with the king, I must report it; for he is always much more accessible to ladies than to gentlemen.”

“No, sir,” said Helen, “I have not the honour of knowing his majesty; but I would fain speak for a moment with Monsieur de Chasseron.”

“He is not here, that I know of,” replied Aubigné. “I have not seen him for some time.”

“If you would give that paper to Marshal Biron,” answered the young lady, “and ask him to condescend to put down where Monsieur de Chasseron is to be found, you would greatly oblige me.”

“That I will do with pleasure,” replied the equerry. “Let this lady and gentleman pass,” he continued, speaking to the guard; and then adding, “I will keep you in the passage for a moment,” he left them, entering a room at the very farther end of the corridor. Within that was another chamber, the door of which Aubigné opened gently; and then stretching in his hand to a gentleman who sat nearest the end of a long table, surrounded by a number of persons, he gave him the paper he had received, saying, “Will you have the goodness to hand that

up to Monsieur de Biron, and ask him to put down for a young lady who waits without, where that gentleman is to be found. You may tell the king, if you like,” he added, in a whisper; “that she is prodigiously handsome.”

He paused a moment while the paper passed from hand to hand. Some who received it, smiled; some passed it on in silence; but Henri Quatre, who sat at the head of the table, remarked what was taking place, and exclaimed, “What is that?—What have you got there? Pardi, send it up.”

The command was immediately obeyed; and, at the same moment, Henry nodding his head to Aubigné a little gravely, as if to reprove him for the curiosity he seemed to evince, said, “You may go, companion.”

The equerry retreated, and closed the door, without, however, quitting the adjacent room; and Helen and Monsieur de Ligones remained standing in the corridor for nearly a quarter of an hour, while numerous attendants and officers passed them every minute. At the end of that time, Aubigné again appeared; and, after informing the count that he could now speak with the king if he would go into the room at the end of the passage, he turned to Helen, saying, “Follow me, mademoiselle. Monsieur de Chasseron is expected very soon; and you can wait for him.”

Helen thanked the old count warmly for his courteous protection on the road, and then prepared to accompany Aubigné; but Monsieur de Ligones whispered with kind intentions in her ear, “I will tell your two men to wait for you in the hall; and, as soon as your conference is over, you had better ride away to Rolleboise or Bonnières, for this is not the best place for a young creature like you. There are too many men here and too few women.”

The blood came up into the poor girl’s face; but she understood that the old nobleman’s meaning was good, and replying, “I will!” she followed her conductor to a small cabinet but scantily furnished, where Aubigné left her, and closed the door.

Seating herself by the table, Helen remained in anxious meditation for more than half an hour, at the end of which time a number of steps were heard in the corridor, and a tall stout man opened the door and looked in. He withdrew again, immediately; and some ten minutes more passed without anything occurring to disturb her reverie. Then, however, the door again opened; and, to her infinite satisfaction, the figure of Chasseron himself, in his worn doublet and heavy boots, appeared, turning round his head as he entered, and saying to some one without, “Wait here! I will return directly.”

Helen sprang up to meet him with that look of gladness and confidence which is hard to resist; and, taking her hand, he exclaimed with a good-humoured smile, "Ah! my little protégée!—Now, I warrant you thought the grey beard had forgotten you; but such was not the case, and you must have passed one of my men on the road. I have been so busy I could not send before. But every one who cares for poor King Henry, must be busy now; for no sooner does he gain one advantage, than his own people help the enemy to deprive him of the fruits of it. Well, what news from St. André? Were the people with whom I left you kind?"

"Oh! most kind," answered Helen de la Tremblade; "Mademoiselle d'Albret is an old and generous friend—better, alas! than I deserve; but it is for her sake I have come hither, not my own."

"Ha! How is that?" asked Chasseron; "has anything happened? Are they not married?—Pardi. I thought they would lose no time. Yet I saw the young baron in the field. He may have been wounded. He is not in the list of killed."

He spoke so rapidly, that Helen had not time to answer anything he said, before something new was uttered. When he paused, however, she replied, "No! Oh, no! He is not killed; but he is a prisoner, which is—or may be—worse."

"Parbleu! that is unfortunate!" cried her companion. "He was one of those, I suppose, who ventured too rashly forward in the town of Ivry. Yet I saw him not there; and I was not far behind myself."

"It was not there he was taken," answered Helen; and, as briefly as possible—for she saw that Chasseron, though wishing to show her every kindness, was in haste—she recapitulated all that had occurred on the banks of Eure, since she had been placed in the farmhouse.

The stout soldier shut his teeth, which were as white as snow, upon his grizzled moustache, and then murmured, "They are unlucky folks! Poor things! To Chartres, did you say? Ventre Saint Gris! something must be done for them.—Well, well, that may be set to rights."

These words seemed more the out-pourings of what was passing in his own mind, than addressed to his fair companion; but the moment after, he turned to her, saying, "I have some small influence here; and I will not fail to use it for Monsieur de Montigni. He once came to my aid, fair lady, when life or death hung upon the event of a moment. He has since served the king to the best of his ability, and the king should show himself grateful. Doubtless he will, and he shall not fail to know the facts. Then it

will not be impossible to exchange, against Monsieur de Montigni, some prisoner in his hands."

"But they fear the Duke of Nemours will send back Mademoiselle d'Albret to Marzay," said Helen; "and then—and then—"

"What then?" asked Chasseron, quickly. "Oh! I see," he continued; "they will force her into a wedding with Nicholas de Chazeul; as dishonest a rogue as ever used the pretence of religion to cover base designs. He shall not have her!—Pardi, he shall not have her if I have any say in the matter."

Helen turned pale, and trembled, but she replied not; and her companion added, after a moment's thought, "Well! that shall be cared for, too, as far as I am able.—What was it you said about our good old friend the commander? Dead, did you say? Why, he fell not on the field!"

"No," answered Helen in a subdued tone, "he died last night of his wounds."

"God have his soul in guard!" cried the stout soldier. "He was a good old man!—But now, my poor young lady, to tell truth—though I am right glad to see you—yet your coming puzzles me not a little. I know not what to do with you here. They say, pity is akin to love, but—" He saw that Helen's cheek turned pale; and he added quickly, "Nay, do not fear; there's honour amongst thieves: and I am not one to take advantage of misfortune.—What I would say is simply, that I know not how or where to lodge you here in honesty or safety. Then, too, where the king goes I must go; and—"

"Nay, sir," replied Helen, "do not embarrass yourself for me or my fate. Deeply grateful am I for kindness to one who, when you found me, was outcast, hopeless, and unfriended; but I am now no longer without protection and support. Good Monsieur Estoc, whom I think you know, sent me hither to tell you all that had occurred, hoping that your influence with the king, or his ministers, might enable you to aid Monsieur de Montigni and Mademoiselle d'Albret; but Monsieur Estoc will protect me. He has promised to do so, and I am sure he will perform it."

"Ay, good faith, that he will!" answered Chasseron, "and it is better that he should than that I should. As to influence, Heaven knows, the king, good man, can rarely be got to do what he ought; and, with his ministers, I have none, alas! But what I can do, I will; and, in the meantime, tell old Estoc, that you have seen Chasseron; and mayhap he will be with him, with a score of lances, for a day's sport. Let him give me speedy news of what is going on. I am here for a day or two, it seems, and cannot get away, for my movements depend on greater men than myself.—But to return to

your own business—What do you do next?"

"To-morrow I am to join Monsieur Estoc," replied Helen, "and go with him to Marzay. They think," she added in a hesitating tone, "that I may be of service there to Mademoiselle d'Albret. To-night I propose to go with the two men who came with me, to Rolleboise or Bonnières."

"Right! right!" replied Chasseron; "yet they are full of our people.—Well, I will send some one with you, to secure you protection.—And now," he continued in a lower and a gentler tone, "when I first found you, I think you were but poorly supplied with that, to which we are all, both great and small, obliged to bow our heads, though it be an idol: I mean money. I am, it is true, very poor; but—"

Helen waved her hand, bending her eyes to the ground, and colouring deeply. Why she did so, the reader must ask of his own heart; but, as her companion spoke, the words he had just before used, that "pity is akin to love," rung in her ears again.

"I have enough," she said, "more than enough, thanks to the generosity of poor Monsieur de Liancourt. Accept, sir, my deepest, my most heartfelt thanks. Had it not been for you, I should not have been, at this hour, alive; and now I will keep you no longer, for I know you are in haste."

"Yet stay a moment," said Chasseron; "I must send some one with you. He shall be here directly. Now farewell."

He gazed on her for a moment—seemed to hesitate; and then, taking her hand in his, raised it to his lips, kissed it, not warmly, though tenderly, and, repeating the word, "Farewell," turned to the door. When his fingers were upon the latch, however, he looked round, saying, "Wait till somebody comes from me—He shall not be long;" and then, opening the door, he left her once more alone.

Ere ten minutes were over, Helen was joined by an elderly man, in a riding dress, who bowing low, said, "I have come from Monsieur de Chasseron, mademoiselle, and am to accompany you to Rolleboise."

Helen expressed her readiness to set out; and following her new guide through the corridor and down the stairs, found the two old soldiers who had accompanied her, waiting with some impatience and anxiety in the hall. The whole party were soon on horseback; and, riding slowly through the darkness, with the bright Seine glistening on their right, reached Rolleboise in about three quarters of an hour. The little inn, however, which, at that time, stood wedged in between the high banks and the river, was filled to the doors; but at Bonnières, about two miles farther, they found all

quiet and tranquil; and the accommodation which they wanted, was easily procured. Helen retired to rest at once; and, rising early the next morning to pursue her way, found the man who had guided her from Rosni, waiting to see her depart.

Nothing more occurred on her journey worthy of the reader's attention, and I shall only therefore notice, that, at Châteauneuf, she found that Estoc and the funeral procession of the old commander had already passed on towards Marzay. She was here obliged again to pause for the night, and did not reach the village of Marzay, which lay at the distance of about half a league from the château, till sunset on the following day. She found Estoc waiting her arrival, full of anxiety on many accounts; for some communication had naturally established itself, between the people of the château and their old companions, and many of the events which have been recorded in the preceding pages had become known to the old soldier.

The news she brought him of her interview with Chasseron seemed to interest him much. Its first effect, however, was to throw him into a fit of meditation, and he made little or no comment, but by the words, "He can do if he will;—and yet I love not this rumour of the boy's death. He is hot and quick; and there may be truth in it, though I think it is but one of their lies after all."

"Whose death?" cried Helen de la Tremblade, turning as pale as death, "not Monsieur de Montigni's?"

"Ay, so they have spread abroad the report," replied Estoc, "but 'tis a falsehood I believe, to drive poor Rose to do what they want. I trust in Heaven she will not believe it."

"And if she does," exclaimed Helen, "she will sooner die than take the fate they offer her. Oh, no! it is one of that terrible woman's frauds. But Rose will never consent."

"I trust not," answered Estoc in a doubtful tone. "But a report has reached me, that they intend to force this marriage upon her to-morrow morning, and our best hope of preventing it lies with you, Mademoiselle Helen."

"I will go directly," said Helen, in a tone wonderfully calm. "I am ready now."

"No, no," replied the old soldier, "not so, my dear; you must wait till all the world's asleep, but your uncle. He watches all night in the chapel. You too have need of rest and refreshment; and an hour before midnight we will set out."

Helen took some food, and then lay down in the cottage, where a chamber had been prepared for her; but sleep visited not her eyelids; and her own thoughts were more

wearisome than any corporeal exertion could have been.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DUEL.

WE left Louis de Montigni on horseback, in a field near Chartres, ready to exchange the deadly shot with one well practised in the use of every weapon; and though we have given some indications of his fate, we must, nevertheless, now return to tell how that morning passed. The Duke of Nemours was, as the reader is well aware, one of the most distinguished members of the League, an enemy of the king, and armed against the life of the young nobleman, who now faced him. The customs of the day, too, rendered the death of an opponent in such a combat, honourable rather than discreditable to the survivor. But, notwithstanding all this, De Montigni had, from the first, felt great reluctance, even to attempt to take the life of his antagonist, and in the terms of duel which he had fixed, he had limited the number of shots, not with any view to his own personal safety; for he was one of those who do not easily apply the thought of danger to their own heart; but in order not to be compelled to injure the duke.

As soon as Nemours saw that he had placed himself, and had wheeled his horse, he raised his hat and bowed, and then replacing it on his head, took the large pistol with which he was armed, in his right hand, his reins in the left, and striking his spurs into the horse's flank, galloped forward to meet his adversary. He had no hesitation on his part, he had no remorse; but De Montigni was equally calm and cool, for his mind was also made up as to what he should do; and keeping a wary eye upon the duke, he likewise rode on, though at a slower pace. Nearer and more near they came to each other, with the muzzles of their pistols raised, till—at the distance of about twenty paces—Nemours levelled his weapon straight at his opponent's head. The next moment De Montigni followed his example, but reserved his fire.

The duke, in truth, did not intend to discharge his pistol at so great a distance; but just at that spot, there was a narrow cut in the field, made for the purposes of irrigation; and, seeing that he must leap it, and thereby shake his hand, Nemours pulled the trigger at once. At that very moment, however, the horse, seeing the little ditch, was rising to the leap, and the duke's aim was consequently unsteady.

It was more just than might have been expected, indeed, for the ball grazed De

Montigni's cheek, and passed through his hat, which was somewhat cast back from his brow. His face was covered with blood in an instant, and he felt himself wounded; but the injury was too slight to move him in any degree, and, without checking his speed, he rode on upon the duke with his pistol levelled, producing, it must be acknowledged, no very pleasant sensations in his antagonist's bosom. When within three yards, he slightly turned his hand to the right, and fired.

The ball flew at a considerable distance from Nemours; and the two horses, carried on by their speed, passed each other before they could be reined up. As they went by, however, the duke exclaimed, "Ah! that is not fair, Monsieur De Montigni."

The young nobleman pulled in the bridle as soon as possible, and returned, inquiring, "What is not fair, my lord?"

"Come, come," said Nemours as they met, "own you did not fire at me."

"Nay, my lord," replied De Montigni with a slight smile, "you have no right to blame me for my bungling. I fired my pistol; that is enough, though I will own, I am glad to see you uninjured."

"Well, Monsieur De Montigni," rejoined the duke, "all I know is, that if my horse had not risen to the leap before there was any need, you would now be lying on that grass; and I am very sure that I saw you turn your pistol to the right, or I might have been lying there instead. Confess the fact; is it not so?"

"You must excuse me, sir," replied De Montigni gravely. "I fired to the best of my judgment; but whatever be your feelings towards me, I am well satisfied that France will not have to reproach me with the death of one of her most gallant princes, nor the king for having deprived him of one who, I trust, will one day be one of his most faithful subjects. But I must stop this blood, for it is staining all my collar. Had your shot been but two inches to the right, there would have been no need of surgeons."

"I am glad it was not," said Nemours frankly; and, both having dismounted, De Montigni took some of the water from the little cut in the meadow, and washed away the gore from his face.

"Stay, stay," cried the duke, producing some lint. "I have always some of this about me when I go to the field; and it will soon staunch the blood."

With his own hands he aided to dress the wound which he had made; and they were still thus employed, when a man, dressed in peaceful attire as it was considered in that day—though his apparel consisted of a stout buff coat, a slouched hat, wide crimson

breeches, a pair of enormous jack boots, a sword and dagger—rode up, mounted on a strong grey charger. Over his shoulders, suspended by a leathern strap, hung a trumpet ornamented with a banner of the arms of France; and drawing in his rein at a distance of about twenty yards from the two gentlemen, as he was passing on towards the high road, he exclaimed, "Ha, ha, messieurs, it is a pity, I think, that I was not here some ten minutes earlier. I could have sounded the charge."

"We have done very well without you, my good friend," replied the duke; "but you seem a trumpet from Henry of Bourbon. What is your errand?"

"That I shall tell to those whom I am sent to," answered the trumpeter.

"Pray whom may they be?" demanded Nemours.

"Monsieur de la Bourdasière, and his highness, the Duke of Nemours," answered the trumpeter. "I shall find them both in Chartres, I suppose?"

"You won't find his highness of Nemours," said the duke, laughing; "unless you wait till I come, my friend. But go on, I will soon follow you."

"If you are the duke," replied the trumpeter, "I may as well give you my letter here, and you can con it over and make up your mind by the way, for I must get back with all speed."

Thus saying, he dismounted from his horse, and led it forward by the bridle towards the duke, drawing forth a letter, at the same time, from a pouch under his left arm. Nemours took it, cut the silk between the two seals with his dagger, and read the contents.

"This is strange enough, De Montigni," he said. "This epistle is all about you, except, indeed, a few words which your king has been pleased to add, regarding the advantages which I might obtain by returning, as he terms it, to my allegiance."

"What is his majesty pleased to say concerning me?" asked De Montigni. "I should scarcely think he knew that I was a prisoner."

"Oh, good faith," exclaimed Nemours, "you are a man of much greater consequence than you imagine. Here, he offers in exchange for your humble self, our good friend, the Marquis de Megnelai, requiring, however, at the same time, the liberty of the fair lady we sent off this morning for Marzay."

"I will beseech you, my lord," replied De Montigni gravely, "not to speak upon that subject, for it is a matter that I cannot easily forgive."

"On my life," cried Nemours, holding out his hand to him frankly, "I am sorry for it, De Montigni; but if it were to be done over again, I should be obliged to do it, for I had

pledged my word; and that cannot be broken. I had letters from your cousin Chazeul, the day before the battle, and assured him in return, that if Mademoiselle d'Albret fell into my hands, she should be restored to her guardian. Otherwise, I would not have done it; and now, believe me, I love you all the better, for having fought with you. Thus, as before, you are at full liberty to go whithersoever you will; and I leave it to you and the king to settle, whether you will take the exchange of Megnelai, or pay ransom as before agreed. I would prefer the former, as the marquis must not say that I have neglected any opportunity to set him free; but perhaps the king may not think fit to agree, as the lady cannot be restored according to his demand."

"I should prefer paying my own ransom," replied De Montigni. "The king's goodness is very great; and I can only attribute it to the services of my good uncle, the commander; but still I would not take advantage of it, if it can be avoided."

"That as you please," replied Nemours; "but the best thing for you now to do, is to return with me to Chartres, and then accompany this good trumpeter back to the Bearnois' head-quarters. We shall not have to detain him long."

De Montigni paused thoughtfully for a moment; but, before he could reply, the king's trumpeter interposed, saying, "I have nothing to take me on to Chartres, Monsieur de Nemours. I was commanded, if I did not find you in the place, to give the letter to Monsieur la de Bourdasière, and tell him to open it; but I have no letter absolutely for him; and if you have settled matters with monsieur here, I do not see why I should not turn my bridle, and ride back."

"Well then, God speed you both," cried Nemours. "Offer my humble duty to the King of Navarre; tell him, I will write myself in the course of the day, but that, in the meantime, I only regret, my conscience will not let me serve a monarch who has placed himself out of the pale of the church; for a braver man, or a better general, does not live."

Thus saying, he put his foot in the stirrup, and sprang upon his horse's back. Then turning to the young nobleman he continued, "Come, shake hands, Monsieur de Montigni. We will part friends, though we met enemies; and if you would take my advice, you would lose no time in being under the walls of Marzay with a strong hand; for there is no knowing what Maître Chazeul may do. He is playing a fine game with my good kinsman Mayenne. We see it well enough; for, unless he had been looking for his own advantage more than for the good of the

League, he would have been upon the field of Ivry, with all his forces, instead of sending forty men under his bailli, which was but a mockery ; and so we should not object to see him humbled a little."

"I will take your advice, my lord," replied De Montigni ; "but to say truth, I am somewhat puzzled as to my movements. I have not been bred up amongst all these scenes of strife, as you have, and know not how or where to raise a body of men in a few hours, though I hear it is done in France daily."

Nemours laughed. "Gold, gold ! Monsieur de Montigni," he replied, "Sides have been so frequently changed, and fortune, the fickle goddess, has spun her wheel round so often, that half France knows not what the other side is fighting for ; and thus, I believe, there are at least a hundred thousand men in this good country, who might be enlisted by beat of drum for any cause under heaven, so that it bore upon its banner the significant emblem of a crown piece. Every village is full of them, and you have nothing to do, but to stuff your pockets with testons, ride into the market place, and shout, 'Who will serve De Montigni ?' and you will have a score at least after your heels, in half an hour, even if your first command should be, that they all turn Turk !"

He spoke somewhat bitterly ; but, though the young nobleman himself was in no very gay mood, he could not help smiling at the picture—too true a one—of the state of France.

"I will try what can be done," he replied ; and, mounting his own horse, he rode off with the trumpeter, in one direction, while Nemours pursued his way back to Chartres.

At the gate of that city, a number of the gentlemen who had come thither in attendance upon his own person, and several of the officers of the garrison, were looking anxiously for his return ; and, well aware of the object for which he had gone forth, had horses ready saddled to seek him in case he did not soon make his appearance.

"Well, my lord duke, well, sir ?" cried half-a-dozen voices as he rode in amongst them, "you have killed him, I suppose ?"

Nemours made no reply ; but La Bourdasière, who was at their head, pointed to the stains upon the duke's hand and sleeve, and, with as much quiet satisfaction as if they were talking of a boar-hunt, exclaimed, "Ay, ay, he has had enough ; that is clear. Your arm is all over blood."

Nemours bent down his head to the governor, saying in a low voice, "He is wounded, but not killed. However, the less we talk about it the better, La Bourdasière ;

for he had my life in his hands, and did not take it. If all that faction would but act as Henry of Navarre and Louis de Montigni, we should soon have France turning heretic for their sake. But, hark you ; I have met with a trumpet from the king, demanding this lad's exchange for De Megnelai. There are a few words in the end of the letter, which make me suspect that Henry will not march on at once to Paris, but that we may have him upon our hands here, before many days be over. You must call in all your parties as fast as possible, and send a messenger at once to Marzay after the people who had gone with De Mottraye. Tell them to make no halt, but to return immediately."

"I have got tidings of the same kind too," replied La Bourdasière, "and I only waited your return to send ; for I knew not if you had any message for Monsieur de Chazeul."

"No," answered the duke thoughtfully, "No ; he is not to be depended on ; but despatch your man as quickly as possible."

This whispered conversation, the blood upon Nemours' hand and sleeve, and the fact of his having returned alone from the field, was quite sufficient to give rise to the rumour of De Montigni's death, which soon became current in Chartres. The truth was known, indeed, before nightfall ; but long ere the report was corrected, the messenger was on his way to Marzay, bearing the tidings as he had first heard them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE RUINED CHÂTEAU.

DE MONTIGNI rode on thoughtfully, for a few minutes, not a little embarrassed how to act. To go to the king seemed absolutely necessary ; and yet he could not but feel, that every step he took was carrying him farther and farther from the spot where he wished to be. To present himself at Marzay without attendants or friends, he knew well, from all the tales that had reached his ears, of the dark proceedings which took place from time to time in the bosom of the noblest families of France, might be a most dangerous experiment. Not that he believed Monsieur de Liancourt would suffer him to receive injury, if he could help it ; but he doubted that the count would be able to prevent the schemes of others from taking effect ; and he dreaded a long imprisonment at that particular moment, almost as much as loss of life. Yet every hour's delay ere he made some effort once more to free Rose d'Albret, or, at least, to assert his claim to her hand, was tedious and terrible to him.

Turning at length to the trumpeter who rode on silently by his side, he inquired, "Well, my friend, where did you leave the king?"

"At a place called Rosni, I think," replied the man; "not far from the town of Mantes."

"You think!" said De Montigni; "are you not sure where you left him?"

"One cannot be sure of anything, in this world," replied the trumpeter dryly; "but that was not what I meant. I intended to say, I think the place is called Rosni, for I am a stranger in this part of the world. France is a big country, monsieur; and I come from a good distance on the other side of Libourne, so I may well be forgiven for not having got all these names by heart."

"What rumour did you hear of the king's movements?" asked De Montigni.

"The last noise I heard of his movements," answered the man, "was a great deal of blowing of horns."

"And pray on what occasion was that?" demanded De Montigni.

"On the occasion of the king going out to hunt," was the reply. "His majesty having chased Mayenne, thought fit to run after a braver beast, though it could scarcely run faster than the other."

"But was there no mention of going to Paris?" said the young nobleman.

"Why, good faith, everybody was talking of it, and nobody doing it," replied his dry companion; "but if you must needs know all, sir, men whispered in one another's ears that the king's pockets were empty, and that his financiers kept them so on purpose."

"For what object?" demanded De Montigni.

"To put the money in their own pocket which they kept out of his," answered his companion. "Try the thing with your own farmers, sir, and you will find the same happen. You will get no money till you go to fetch it, that you may be sure of."

"I hope I shall," answered De Montigni, "for I have much need of it just now."

"Ah, poor young gentleman," replied the trumpeter; "I am sorry for you; for those who want money, and don't choose to go and fetch it, will soon have to ride in holey boots. However, why should a subject be better off than a king? I have seen our Henry before now, with a hole in the elbow of his pourpoint; and many a time he has been glad to dine off pumpkin soup and a lump of black bread."

"Poor fare, assuredly, for a monarch," said De Montigni musing; "and yet the want of money may produce worse disasters than that, my friend,—especially where time is almost life."

"Assuredly, sir," answered the trumpeter;

"but perseverance comes to the aid of all. I thought I never should have got to Chartres this morning; for there are all sorts of bands roving the country, who have no more respect for a trumpet or a flag of truce, than they have for an old cheese, or a maid's modesty."

De Montigni remained silent for several minutes; but at length he said, "I wish I could meet with one of those bands you speak of."

"By my faith and honour, sir," replied his companion with a laugh, "you may meet with one of them sooner than you would find pleasant. They are as easy to be found as crowslips in the spring, but not quite so fragrant."

"They might answer my purpose, however," said the young baron. "I suppose they would take service with any one who would pay them?"

"Ay, that they would," rejoined the trumpeter; "though you might find some honour amongst them too, notwithstanding all that Monsieur de Nemours said just now. Your furious Leaguer—unless he were a gentleman—would not sell himself to the king, for any money; and your stiff Protestant would not go over to the League for gold and roast meat. But there are plenty of birds between those two flights, who care not a straw on which side they appear, so that they fight, plunder, and get paid."

In such conversation De Montigni and his companion rode on for about an hour and a half, the young nobleman every now and then falling into a fit of thought, and revolving, with doubt and hesitation, the course he had to pursue. Lose Rose d'Albret, he was resolved he would not, without using every effort in his power; and yet he feared that, in the lawless state to which France had been reduced by long years of civil contention, she might be driven, if not to wed Chazeul—for that he believed nothing could induce her to do—at least to take those monastic vows which would place as impassable a barrier between them. To his just claims, he knew a deaf ear would be turned by those who had her in their hands; and no means seemed feasible to deliver her but force; and yet his heart revolted at the idea of taking arms against him by whom he had been nurtured and protected in his early years, and of attacking the dwelling where all his young and happy days had been passed. Yet "desperate evils," he thought, "require a desperate remedy; and that which is refused to justice, must be obtained by force." His mind then again reverted to the means; and, at length, he settled upon the plan of endeavouring to join the band of the Commander de Liancourt, of whose death it must be remembered he was

ignorant. He knew that his uncle had been upon the way to join the king; and though he had not seen him in the fight of Ivry, the old soldier might well have been there, he thought; for, in the hurry and confusion of the field, and the disguise which the arms then worn afforded, two brothers might stand within a few yards of each other, without the slightest recognition taking place. As he thus meditated, he turned to his companion and inquired, if he had been at the field of Ivry.

"To be sure I was," replied the man; "and blew till I thought I should have burst my cheeks. The first thing that made Mayenne's standard begin to flap backwards and forwards, was the wind of my trumpet."

"Did you chance to hear of or see the old Commander de Liancourt?" asked the young nobleman; "and if you did, can you tell me what has become of him?"

"See him, I did not," said the man, "for he was boxed up in his arms like a crab in his shell. But when he came up behind the Cornette Blanche, I asked who he was, and they told me. As to what became of him, I do not know, for I lost him in the battle."

"Did you hear anything, then, of one Monsieur de Chasseron?" asked De Montigni.

"No," replied the man; "was he there? I knew his brother very well, if that will do; he who was killed at Contras."

"No, that will not do," said De Montigni. "It was of a gentleman, who was with the king the night before this last battle, I spoke."

"I did not see him," answered the trumpeter; and there the conversation dropped; but scarcely had five minutes passed, before three horsemen were seen riding towards them at a quick pace. "Now," cried the trumpeter, "you may have a chance of beginning your band. Here come some folks who seem as if they were seeking employment."

"I think I have a chance, indeed," replied the young nobleman with a smile, as he recognised one of his own servants, at the head of the party. "If I mistake not, these men will join us at a word."

The next moment the horsemen rode up, and great was their joy to see the young baron again; for, besides the man who had been long with him in Italy, were two of those who had accompanied him and Rose d'Albret in their flight from Marzay. He now learned that, having heard of his capture by the Duke of Nemours, and that he had been carried a prisoner to Chartres, they were riding with all speed towards that city, in order to offer him their services during his captivity.

But though De Montigni was certainly re-

joiced at their coming, his satisfaction was sadly clouded by the intelligence they brought of his good uncle's death. Many a question did he ask, and many a long detail did they give, of the scene which closed the preceding night at the farmhouse on the banks of the Eure; and amongst other facts which were now communicated to him, was the intention of Estoc, as soon as he could make his preparations, to carry the body of his dead leader to the chapel at Marzay.

"He must wait some time before he can set out," added the servant, "and, if we make haste, we may join him on the way; for I am sure, sir, you would like to be present at the good old knight's funeral."

"Undoubtedly," replied De Montigni, "on every account I should wish to be there. Do you know what road Estoc will take?"

"I cannot tell, sir," replied the man, "but I should think he would not be able to march from St. André, before to-morrow morning."

"Then let us direct our course thither, with all speed," said De Montigni. "Which road ought we to take?"

"We could not do better than follow the one we are upon," answered the man who had served him as a guide towards Dreux. "A high road is always better than a by-one, when we have nothing to fear; and the country between this and Nogent le Roy, is quite clear of the enemy."

"By my faith, I do not know that," replied the trumpeter. "I know I was obliged to go round two miles, to get out of the way of a party all decked out with crosses of Lorraine."

"Nonsense, nonsense," cried the servant; "if we did meet twenty or thirty of them, they would run at the very sight of us. Every village that we passed, was mounting the white scarf; and a flood of loyalty has overflowed the land, which threatens to wash the League out of France."

Without further debate, De Montigni led the way on upon the road they were travelling, anxious, if possible, to reach Aunet that night. But mortal man is destined to meet with impediments in whatever course he may pursue, and many were those which delayed the young nobleman in his progress. The roads were heavy, his horse, and the horses of his followers, wearied by marching during several preceding days; and it was found necessary to halt for an hour at Nogent, in order to refresh them.

It was a beautiful evening in the spring, however, when they once more resumed their way; and the interval of their halt was not ill employed by De Montigni, in writing a letter to the king, expressing his gratitude for the monarch's condescension and kindness, informing him of the motives which led

him to Marzay, and promising to rejoin him, accompanied by all the force he could muster, with as little delay as possible. This epistle he placed in the hands of the trumpeter, who was to quit them when they turned towards Aunet; but, in the meantime, the good man rode on by the young gentleman's side, entertaining him, or at least striving to do so, by his quaint observations on all the circumstances of the time.

Thus proceeding, they had advanced to a spot three or four miles from Nogent, where they paused to consider of their farther course on the brow of a little eminence, from which two cross roads were seen branching to the right and left. Although, as the servant had stated, they had found the whole country rapidly resuming its loyalty, as a consequence of the king's success, yet they had learned at Nogent, that the town of Dreux still held out stiffly for the League; and that to attempt the passage under its walls, might be dangerous.

The hill, on which they stood, commanded a wide view over the undulating plain below; and clothing the side of the descent, was a thick low wood already beginning to grow red with the first promise of the spring. About a mile in advance, rose the tower of an old chateau, even then partially decayed, and of which nothing is now to be found, but one ruined wall rising on the top of a tree-covered mound, which the reader, if he ever travels from Versailles to Dreux, towards the hour of sunset, may see on his left hand, with the light streaming in a long bright ray through the solitary window which time has spared. When I saw it, all the building and the wood below were in deep shadow, except where that solitary beam fell, lighting up one particular track, like some sweet memory in the shady expanse of past-by years.

A little way down the road, when the young Royalist and his followers reached the brow of the hill, from behind a clump of trees which projected somewhat farther than the rest, rose a thin column of pale bluish smoke; and the trumpeter, touching De Montigni's arm, pointed it out to him, saying, "Now, sir, if you wish to increase your band, here's the opportunity. I will wager my trumpet against a cow-herd's horn, that under those trees there is a party of good gentlemen boiling their pot, and not knowing how to fill it to-morrow."

"The more I can gain, the better," replied De Montigni; "but I have little time to spare. How many men had Monsieur Estoc with him?" he continued, turning to his servant.

"Fifteen or twenty, I think," replied the man. "I did not count them, but there could not well be less."

"We must have more," said De Montigni; "many more, if it be possible to find them. Let us try what we can do here;" and, somewhat rashly and inconsiderately, he rode down the hill, without further examination. At the first sound of his horse's feet, the figure of a man armed in cuirass and steel cap, came out from behind the trees, as if on the watch; and the young nobleman could see him turn round and speak to some persons behind; and when De Montigni had reached the spot itself, he found four others seated round a fire, apparently engaged in the very peaceable occupation of eating their soup out of a large earthen pot, which stood amongst the ashes. The two parties were equal in number; and the strangers showed no hostile colours, nor, indeed, any alarm; so that De Montigni imagined there could be no risk in pausing for a few moments to talk with them.

"Well, my men," he said, "you seem to be out of employ."

"No, monsieur," replied one of them, "I think we are very well employed. I wish we were sure of such good occupation to-morrow;" and he laughed as he carried a spoonful of soup to his mouth.

"Perhaps I may be able to furnish it to you," rejoined De Montigni, "if you are willing to take service with me."

The man gazed at him for a moment, and then ran his eye over the young gentleman's companions, pausing for a little at the figure of the trumpeter, and the royal arms which hung upon his instrument of music.

"We are no way scrupulous, sir," he said, "all that we require, is good pay down on the day, and a gallant leader, not too particular."

"Good pay you shall have," replied De Montigni, "and that exactly discharged. But I must have obedience to my commands, and no grumbling at plenty of work."

"I see no reason why it should not be a bargain," rejoined the other; "I suppose you are raising a band, sir?"

"I am," answered De Montigni, "or rather I am seeking to add to a band already raised, but somewhat scanty."

"How many have you got; and how many do you want?" was the next question.

"I have about twenty at command," said the young nobleman, "and wish to treble that number at the least."

"For whose service?" demand another of the soldiers, rising, in which action he was followed by the rest.

De Montigni paused for a moment, ere he replied, and then said, "For my own in the first place, and then for the king's. But I should think to you, my men, it would not make much difference on whose side you fought, so that you exercise your calling."

"Perhaps not," answered the other; and, turning to his companions, they all spoke together in a low tone for a minute or two. The one who had taken the principal part in the conversation, then advanced closer to De Montigni, inquiring what pay he would give them, if they agreed to do as he wished. But his eye was upon their movements, for there had been something in the tone in which the last few questions had been asked, which seemed to him suspicious; and now perceiving that the other four sauntered leisurely towards a tree, against which their short lances or pikes had been resting, he turned towards his followers, exclaiming aloud, "Your hands upon your pistols!"

"Why, what are you afraid of?" asked the soldier, in a scoffing tone; but at the same instant, De Montigni's servant shouted, "There are horse upon the hill, sir! Ride on, ride on!"

The young nobleman turned his rein; but the soldier who was before him, made a sudden spring towards him, and endeavoured to seize his bridle; while the four others cast themselves across the road with their pikes levelled.

The young gentleman, however, was quicker than his antagonist. His sword was out of the sheath in an instant; and before the man, crying "Yield to the Holy League," could grasp his bridle, he dealt him a blow upon the steel cap that made him stagger. A second brought him to his knee; and a third would most likely have despatched him; but there was no time to be lost; a considerable body of cavalry were coming down at a quick pace; and, heading his men, De Montigni charged the pikemen on the road, who wavered a little at the sight of the maltreatment their comrade had received. Had they stood firm, they might have detained their opponents, till the horse from above had joined them; but a pistol shot from one of the young baron's followers, stretched the foremost on the ground; and the others give way at once.

"Quick, sir, quick!" cried the man who had guided De Montigni from Marzay. "They have green scarfs! We must gallop for our lives!" and, setting spurs to their horses, the whole party rode down the hill at full speed.

It was now a complete flight and pursuit; for the cavalry from above hurried on their horses, with voice and spur; and the royal trumpeter put his instrument to his mouth, and blew a long loud blast, but without ever pausing in his headlong speed. On, on the Royalist party went, riding for life and liberty; but the others came quicker still behind them; and near the foot of the hill, the trumpeter's horse made a false step, stumbled, and rolled over with his rider.

"Spur, sir, spur!" cried the guide, seeing his leader inclined to pause. "This way, this way! We shall distance them among the narrow roads. They are too many to follow fast."

But De Montigni's horse was still fatigued; and the bad state of the by-ways to the right, into which they now struck, made the beast labour and stumble continually. As the man had supposed, a number of the pursuers were quickly left behind; but still some ten or twelve followed; and it soon became evident to the young baron's party that they must ere long be overtaken.

"We had better turn and fight it out," said De Montigni; "my horse is failing. They cannot force us in this lane."

"No, no, sir!" cried the guide, "let us on to the old château, at least. If we find the gate open, we can make it good against them; and they dare not stay long before it.—'Tis close at hand!"

"On, then!" cried De Montigni; and touching his charger with the spur once more, they were soon at the foot of the little rise, not more than a hundred yards in length, which led to the building.

Seeing their intention, the pursuers took to their fire-arms, and a pistol-ball or two whizzed amongst them. One struck the guide upon the shoulder; but he was covered with a good buff coat, and the distance was too great for the shot to have any serious effect. The gates stood wide open; the courtyard was covered with grass—the windows closed; and, in a few minutes, the whole of the fugitives were in the court.

De Montigni sprang to the ground, and endeavoured to close the gates; but a pile of rubbish had accumulated against them, and only one valve would swing upon its hinges. Those who followed were within fifty yards, when one of the men, who had ridden on up to the house, exclaimed, "Here, sir, here, this door is open;" and, casting loose his rein, the young nobleman sprang across the court, up the steps, and into the vacant and desolate hall, just as the enemy poured in through the gates. Two of De Montigni's men led their horses up, and into the building; but the third was so closely pursued, that he was obliged to abandon his beast; and the heavy door was only just closed when the Leaguers were on the steps.

"Quick! run round and see that every door and window is fast!" exclaimed the young baron to his little party. "On that depends our safety;" and he himself setting the example, hurried from room to room, and from passage to passage, while those without seemed to hold a consultation together; and some hammered violently against the wood-work with the butt-end of their large pistols, and strove to force the staples, by their

united strength. Two doors at the back were found open, but were soon secured; and though some of the windows were not closed, and, indeed, were without either their glass or frames, yet they were too high from the ground to be reached from without, without the aid of ladders.

In about five minutes, De Montigni and his men were once more assembled in the hall, and their little council was soon held.

"They will never venture to stay long," cried one.

"And they cannot force us here without axes or hammers," exclaimed another.

"We must not let them try," answered De Montigni. "Who has got powder and ball? My pistol is unloaded."

"I have," said one, "but it is a scanty stock;" and he approached his horse, which stood panting with a drooping head and heavy eye in the midst of the hall.

"I have a good supply," cried the servant, "thanks to Monsieur Estoc. He said I might want it;" and taking his master's pistol, he charged it with powder and ball.

"Now follow to the windows above," said De Montigni; "you Ralph, and you Martin. Let the other stay here, and watch through that keyhole."

Thus saying, he led the way up the stairs—which entered, at the other end of the hall—to the rooms above the doorway; the windows of which were wide open and without any defence. The sill, however, was itself breast-high; and creeping, with his loaded pistol in his hand, towards the casement which, he calculated, was immediately above the steps, De Montigni looked out into the court. A greater number of the Leaguers had by this time come up; and the open space contained at least twenty men. In the centre of the court, was a group of five or six, surrounding the poor trumpeter, who was remonstrating loudly against the stopping of a flag of truce, but apparently in vain; for they had stripped him of the pouch he carried under his arm, and one of them was busily reading the very letter to the king, which De Montigni had written at Nogent. Closer to the château, were several others; and one, wearing a gay green scarf, was standing behind a man who, bending down his head, was looking through the large key-hole of the door. The young nobleman beckoned to his men, who had remained a step or two behind, to come quietly up; and as they advanced, bending low to avoid being seen, he whispered to them to follow his example; and then singling out the Leaguer of the green scarf, he levelled his pistol and fired. The man instantly fell back, and rolled down the steps into the court, and the two servants discharging their weapons at the same time, cast the group in

the centre into marvellous confusion, severely wounding two of those who composed it.

De Montigni instantly retreated from the room to charge again; but, as soon as he had reached the passage beyond, the man who had accompanied him from Marzay, whispered in his ear, "Do you know who they are? Pardi, that was a good shot of yours, sir!—you knocked over the Bailli de Chazeul. We shall have to fight for our lives, however, if they know who you are; for doubtless orders have been sent to bring you in, dead or alive."

"The Bailli de Chazeul!" repeated De Montigni in surprise. "Ay, I remember Monsieur de Nemours mentioned he had been sent to Mayenne's force. But we must act, not talk. I should be sorry to believe my cousin would give any commands contrary to the rights of blood; but if he have done so, the more need of gallant defence; and here we can surely maintain ourselves till help arrives."

"Oh, yes!" answered the man in a confident tone; "they can neither force nor starve us, while we have these good doors for our defence, and two horses to eat."

Without further consultation, De Montigni returned to the window with the same precautions as before; but he found that the whole party of Leaguers had retired to the other side of the court, and were gathered together round the wounded men. The air was now growing grey with twilight; and even if he could have seen to take a just aim, the distance was too great to afford a chance of doing any damage to the enemy. The eyes of several of those below were turned towards the windows; and, catching a glance of a man's head, raised somewhat above the stone-work, one of them exclaimed, "There! there!" loud enough for the sound to reach his ears. The next thing he expected was a volley; but the moment after a man advanced waving a white handkerchief, and crying, "Truce! truce!"

De Montigni was silent, till the Leaguer coming nearer, demanded, "Is the Baron de Montigni amongst you?—nay, we know he is!"

"Well," answered the young nobleman, raising his head, "what if he be?"

"Then let him surrender to the Holy Catholic League," replied the man, "and take quarter."

"If you be really of the Roman Catholic League," replied the young nobleman, "you have nought to do but to retire; for Monsieur de Montigni is furnished with a pass from the Duke of Nemours. But if you be plunderers and marauders, as I strongly suspect, keep your distance, for you cannot force us here, and the attempt will cost you dear, as you must have learned by this time."

The man retired a step or two, and after consulting for a minute with those behind, he again came forward, saying, "If you have got a pass, Monsieur de Montigni, come down and show it."

"Will any three amongst you, being gentlemen, be hostages that the pass shall be respected?" demanded De Montigni, "otherwise I open not the doors."

"Mark you, Monsieur le Baron," cried another, who seemed to be of a superior rank, advancing from behind, and speaking in an angry tone. "You had better surrender, for we are resolved to have you; and though we have not tools to-night, we will watch you well, and force your gates to-morrow morning. We will give you till daybreak to consider; but if you yield not with the first ray of the sun, we will pile up the doors with faggots and burn you out."

"Long ere to-morrow morning our friends will be here," replied De Montigni; "and you will be caught in your own trap. So do as you list, gentlemen, but think not to deceive us, for we will keep good watch too."

"We know better, we know better," answered the last speaker. "The Bearnois is at Mantes, his forces dispersing, and he himself going on to Meulan. So we shall rest quiet enough, and to-morrow will see you our prisoner, or roasted like an egg in the ashes. You have wounded one of our best men, I fear, to death; and you shall not escape us; but if you surrender to-night you shall have good quarter."

"That I will never," cried De Montigni; "and if one of you be wounded to death, many another shall fall before you place the faggots that you talk of; and so no more; for if you come nearer I will fire."

The spoke sman of the Leaguers retiring slowly, seemed to consult for a few minutes with the rest; and then, carrying away two in their arms, while another walked supported by one of his companions, the whole body retreated from the court; but by the remaining light they might be seen to halt just beyond the walls; and one small party was observed to detach itself to the right and a second to the left, as if to guard the other sides of the building. A single horseman, too, rode off in the direction of the hill from which they had come down in pursuit; and it was evident that their present intention was to keep their word of remaining before the château all night.

CHAPTER XXX.

ROSE IS RESCUED.

WHEN Helen de la Tremblade first entered the chapel by a private door which led from a small room, called the sacristy, through

the walls, into the country beyond, and of which Estoc possessed a key, she found the building vacant. There stood the coffin, covered with its pall; there burnt the lights upon the altar; and a little farther on the pale flame of a votive lamp, dedicated by some of the deceased lords of Liancourt to their patron saint, flickered before a little shrine, and cast a faint gleam into the right-hand aisle.

Helen's heart beat, and her temples throbbed. Her breath came thick and hard; and with difficulty her trembling limbs bore her forward. She was resolute, however; her mind was made up, and prepared, and her whole spirit nerved for the terrible task—the most terrible that human being can perform—of confessing to one who has built up a fabric of love and confidence upon our virtue and our honour, a tale of sin and shame; and slowly, feebly, and unsteadily, but with strong determination, she tottered forward till she reached the open space between the coffin and the altar. Just as she did so, she heard a step approaching the chapel across the court. She knew it was that of him whom she sought, and her heart sunk at the sound. Clasping her hands together, and bending her head, she murmured prayer upon prayer for strength, for forgiveness; while the step came nearer and more near, entered the chapel, advanced up the nave, suddenly paused, and remained suspended for more than a minute.

"He sees me," thought Helen. "Oh, God! how shall I meet him?"

She dared not raise her head; her hands remained clasped in the same position; her limbs lost all power; and she seemed for the moment turned into stone.

At length she heard a voice. "Helen!" it cried, "Helen," and then came the priest's step rapidly moving towards her. The rustle of his garments told her he was near; for she dared not look up; and she sank upon her knees at his feet. Then were poured forth the rapid words of shame and contrition, which we have mentioned; and then came a terrible pause, at the end of which she felt his arms around her, and heard the words of still enduring love and tenderness, with which he spoke. A wild and agonised sob burst from her bosom, and then the overloaded heart relieved itself by tear.

The old man soothed and consoled his niece. He dried her eyes, he pressed her to his bosom, he told her to be comforted, he promised her forgiveness of all. He held out to her the high and merciful hopes vouched by the word of God for every sinner that repents, and, in the end he succeeded in tranquillising her first emotions.

But Helen remembered the tale she had to tell. She recollected that every minute might be precious; and when seeing her more calm, he desired her to tell him all, she did so as rapidly and clearly as the natural feelings of her heart would admit. The narrative was mingled with the tears and blushes of burning shame and bitter remorse and agonising self-condemnation, even while she related with simple truth, the arts which had been used to mislead, and the promises which had been held out but to destroy. She attempted not to palliate, for no tongue could be more full of blame, than hers was of herself; but yet her whole tale was in itself a palliation of her fault; and when she came to the end, all that remained in the bosom of the priest, was anger and indignation towards the woman who had so neglected innocence committed to her charge, and towards the man who had so basely taken advantage of that neglect to deceive a confiding heart, and stain a pure and innocent spirit.

"The villain!" he cried, "the base deceitful villain. But even he is less culpable than that dark demon his mother. If ever there was a fiend in human flesh 'tis she!—She burnt the letters, then? She took from you the only proofs of his treachery and his falsehood?"

"She did," said Helen. "She called me every odious name, which, perhaps, I but too well deserved; and, in the midst of all her servants, drove me forth, to perish, for aught she knew, unfriended and alone."

"She shall have her punishment," replied Walter de la Tremblade in a stern, resolute tone. "Ay, here as well as hereafter. All the letters did you say?—all?"

"All I think," said Helen. "Nay," she added, "there may be one which I placed in the Book of Hours you gave me; and it may have escaped her notice, though doubtless she has caused search to be made since I was driven away. Yet, as the book is clasped, it might not be observed."

"What were its contents?" demanded the priest eagerly, with his keen eye fixed upon her face, so that its light seemed to dazzle and confuse her.

Helen lifted her hand to her head, and for a moment gazed into vacancy with the effort to remember. "Yes," she said at length, "yes, it was the last but one he wrote me. He promised to love me ever.—He said he would see me soon.—He called me his wife."

"He did? He did?" cried the priest, with a look of triumph. "That letter must be obtained, Helen!"

"But how?" demanded the poor girl with a mournful shake of the head; "even if it still exists, they will not let me enter those doors again."

"No," answered Walter de la Tremblade. "No, you never shall. But still that letter must be obtained, if it be in being. Ay, and it shall be too; and that before to-morrow morning. What is the hour? Near one,—I had forgot, I had forgot. We have no time to lose! That accursed plot is on the eve of execution. It must be frustrated;" and, pressing his hand hard upon his brow, he fixed his eyes upon the pavement in deep meditation. "Yes," he said at length, "that will do! Listen to me, Helen. They have laid a scheme to drive Rose d'Albret, who always loved you, into the arms of him who has betrayed you. They have persuaded her that Louis de Montigni is dead; and they think by blasting her reputation to leave her no choice but marriage with Chazeul."

"Oh, horrible!" cried Helen. "How base! how shameless!"

"It is worthy of its framer," replied the priest. "The maid is bribed or frightened to give him this night—yes, within a few minutes from this time—to give him admission to her chamber."

"Oh! let me fly and tell her," cried Helen vehemently. "She must be saved, she must be saved.—I will go to her, I will go to her!—I will stay with her.—I will stab him first with my own hand!"

"Be calm, be calm," replied the priest; "there is no need of that. We can frustrate him as easily, and more innocently. There is a door from my chamber into hers. It is unlocked or can be speedily opened. By it you can go to her and tell her all. Let her know that De Montigni is living, that the rumour of his death was but a fraud. Tell her how they are practising against her peace. Bid her be firm and constant, and she shall have aid, when least she expects it. Stay with her if you will—or rather bring her forth into my chamber. There she can pass the night in security, and return with first dawn of morning. And now let us hasten away, Helen, for this must be done, my child, before the clock strikes one. I have to watch here; but to prevent this deed is a higher duty, and I may well be spared for a few minutes. And God's blessing be upon your endeavours."

Thus saying, he led her from the chapel, through the old hall and the corridor beyond, and then up the stairs, feeling his way by the hand-ropes that ran along the wall. All was dark and silent; not a sound stirred in the house; and nothing but a faint ray of the moonlight, which shot across from a window half way up the staircase, gave them any light in their course.

Opening the door of his own chamber, as quietly as possible, the priest led Helen in; and then striking a light, he showed her the

door which led to the apartments of Rose d'Albret. It was locked, but the key was in the inside and easily turned; and, ere they opened it, Walter de la Tremblade once more embraced his niece, saying, "I must find another time to comfort thee, my poor child; but the best comfort will be vengeance on those who have wronged thee. Now go, and make no noise. Speak to her in a whisper. Bid her rise at once and follow thee, if she regards her safety, and her honour. Then lock both these doors, and rest in peace for this night. I will be with you early in the morning; but I have much to do ere then."

Thus saying, he kissed her brow, and left her; and Helen opening the door, but leaving the light upon the table, crept softly into the room of Mademoiselle d'Albret. Poor Rose, wearied and exhausted with all that she had lately gone through, had at length fallen into slumber. The curtains of her bed were thrown back; and there she lay like a beautiful statue on a tomb, her face pale with grief and weariness, the bright eyes closed, the long black lashes resting on her cheek, and one fair hand crossing her heaving bosom in all the languid relaxation of sleep. The light streamed faintly in upon her from the neighbouring chamber, and seemed to produce some effect upon her slumbers; for a faint smile passed over her lip, as Helen stood for an instant to gaze at her, and she murmured the word "Louis."

"She has happy dreams," said Helen to herself, "yet I must disturb them;" and she laid her hand gently upon that of her friend.

Rose started up with a look of wild surprise, but Helen laid her finger on her lips as a sign to be silent, and then whispered, "Rise instantly, dearest Rose, and come with me into the next room. Be quick, if you would save your honour and your peace! You know not what they machinate against you."

Rose gazed at her for a moment in surprise, as if scarcely comprehending what she meant; but then a sudden look of terror came over her; and, rising without a word, she took some thin clothing, and followed whither her companion led.

Helen drew the curtains close round the bed, and then guided the lady to the priest's chamber. While passing the door, they heard a murmur, as of low voices speaking in the anteroom, and Helen then turning the key in the lock as silently as possible, pointed to an ebony crucifix, with a small ivory figure of the dying Saviour nailed upon it, which stood upon the table, rising above a skull. She led Rose d'Albret towards it; and, kneeling down together, they prayed.

When they rose, Mademoiselle d'Albret would fain have asked explanations, but Helen whispered to be silent; and making her lie down in the priest's bed, she knelt by her side, drew the curtain round to deaden the sound of her voice, and then, in a low murmur, related all she had to tell. The first news that she gave were the joyful tidings that De Montigni still lived; and Rose clasped her hands gladly, giving thanks to God. But at Helen's further intelligence, horror and consternation took possession of her. "Oh, heaven!" she said, "what will become of me, if they have recourse to such means as this? Where shall I find safety?"

"Fear not, fear not," replied Helen, "my uncle will devise means to deliver you."

"Oh, let me fly, Helen," said Rose. "The door by which you came into the chapel, may give me freedom."

Helen shook her head: "Not to-night," she said. "You might meet him in the passages. As soon as he discovers you have left your room, there will be search and inquiry. We must trust to him who brought me hither; but Walter de la Tremblade is not a man to be frustrated by anyone. Leave it to him—he will deliver you."

No sound as yet had reached them from the neighbouring chamber, although they had now quitted it nearly an hour; but the door was thick and heavy, and deeply sunk in the wall. The next moment, however, they heard voices speaking at the top of the stairs; and someone said aloud, "Good-night, Monsieur de Chazeul!"

Those simple words were followed by a meaning laugh; then some other sounds not so distinct, and then all was silent again.

"You were right, dear Helen," said Rose d'Albret. "We should have been stopped had I attempted to fly. But where will this end?—where will this end?" and, turning her eyes to the pillow, she wept bitterly.

Helen tried to comfort her, though she herself needed consolation as much; for who can tell what were all the varied sensations, each painful, yet each different from the rest, which thronged her bosom on that sad night? She felt, oh, how bitterly! that she had loved a villain, deeper, blacker, more degraded than all his treachery to her could have taught her to believe; and there is no agony so horrible as when the cup of affection is first mingled with contempt and abhorrence. She was not only neglected and cast off for another, that she could have borne, and wept or withered away in silence; but she found him for whom she had sacrificed all, using still baser arts than those he had employed against herself, for sordid objects, and without even the excuse of passion,

She felt grief, too, for Rose d'Albret, for her who had been so tender and so kind towards herself; and dread, lest, after all, the machinations of those who had the poor girl in their toils, should prove successful, came like a cold dark cloud over the dreary prospect of the future.

All these emotions were added to her own shame and remorse and terrible disappointment; and, although Rose insisted that she should lie down beside her, yet neither closed an eye; and the rest of the night passed in long, though not uninterrupted, conversation. Often they listened for sounds, often they paused to meditate over all the painful circumstances that surrounded them; but still they turned to discuss, with faint and sinking hearts, either the gloomy past or the dark impenetrable time to come, which offered their eyes no tangible hope to rest upon, but in fresh sorrow, resistance and endurance.

With the first ray of light, Rose d'Albret returned to her own chamber, determined to follow to the least particular the advice of the priest; but Helen remained in her uncle's room, in expectation of his return. Minute after minute fled, however, without his coming. She heard Rose call her maid, and voices speaking; she heard the sounds of busy life spread through the château; she heard distant tones of a hunting horn swell up from the woody country beyond. But still her uncle did not appear; and Helen, in terror at the thought of new calamity, watched for him in vain.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PRIEST.

WE must now return to Walter de la Tremblade, who closed the door of the room where he had left his niece, and paused one moment to think. "It must be risked," he said: "the boy owes me much.—He will not dare to doubt me;" and, without further consideration, he again descended the stairs. At the bottom, he heard a step, and saw a light glimmering through the door at the far end of the hall. "It is that base villain!" he thought as he concealed himself behind one of the square masses of masonry that supported the roof above. "He goes upon his dark errand, like the silent withering frost of autumn, blighting all the flowers it falls upon. Ah, monster!" he muttered between his teeth, as he saw the marquis pass not ten steps from him: and well was it for Chazeul, well for himself, that there was no dagger under that priest's robe.

Covered with a dressing-gown of embroi-

dered silk, and bearing a lamp in his hand, with a stealthy step and an eye looking eagerly forward, as if agitated with the very scheme in which he was taking part, Chazeul crossed the hall and approached the staircase. There was a slight rustle of the priest's gown, and the other paused suddenly and listened. All was still again; and he murmured, "It was the wind!" The next instant the clock struck one, and with a smile the marquis mounted the stairs.

The moment he was gone, Walter de la Tremblade came forth again, and with a quick step went on, through the stone hall, across the court, and entered the chapel. There, with haste and agitation, he lighted a lamp that stood in the sacristy, returned, shading the flame with his hand, and, traversing the hall in another direction, passed through a low arch and along a narrow passage, which led him to the foot of a small staircase. Then, taking two steps at a time, he mounted rapidly to the highest storey of the château where two or three rooms were seen on either hand. Through the key-hole of one streamed a light, and voices were heard talking.

"Ay, there wait her witnesses," murmured the priest; and, proceeding, he turned into a passage on the left, and listened at a door. All was still; and, setting down the lamp, he raised the latch and entered. It was a low ill-furnished room, where slept the page, and one of the servants of the Marchioness of Chazeul, in beds not large enough to hold more than a single person. At the first pallet the priest stopped; and shading his eyes with his hand, as if to concentrate the little light that found its way in at the door, which he had left open, he gazed upon the countenance of the sleeping man. Then, going on, he touched the page gently with his hand. The boy slept soundly, however, and the priest had to stir him once more before he awoke. Then whispering "Hush!" he added, "Get up, Philip. There is business for you to do."

"Ay! what is it, father?" said the boy, rubbing his eyes, still heavy with sleep: "is anything the matter?"

"Do not speak so loud," replied father Walter; "there is no need to wake any one else. The marchioness has chosen you to ride for something that both she and I may have occasion to see; and you must mount and away to Chazeul immediately, so as to be back before nine to-morrow, when the burial of the old Commander de Liancourt is to take place. Are you awake enough to understand me?"

"Oh, yes, yes," answered the page yawning, "I understand quite well. I wish she had chosen another hour. At home, we can never count upon half a night's sleep: she is

as restless as the wind; and it is to be the same thing here, it seems. But what am I to bring?"

"A certain precious Book of Hours," replied the priest, "which has been long in the family of La Tremblade. You will find it in the room which my niece, Mademoiselle de la Tremblade, *used to occupy*." He paused upon the words, to show the boy that he was aware of Helen's absence from the Château of Chazeul, and then continued, "You will know the book, if you should find others there, by its being covered with crimson velvet, with silver clasps and studs. Bring it at once to me; and let no one else see it."

"But will that old tiger of a gouvernante let me have it?" asked the page: "she will not let one of us set foot in any room beyond the hall."

"Then make her fetch it," said the priest. "Tell her your mistress wants it; and let her refuse if she dare. Now, be quick. Cast on your things, and join me in the chapel. I will order a horse to be saddled in the meantime. But, make no noise. It is needless to wake any one; and the marchioness would have your going secret."

The page entertained no suspicion; and—while Walter de la Tremblade hurried to the stable, woke a horse-boy and made him saddle a horse in haste—he dressed himself as quickly as his drowsy state would admit; and then, finding his way out of the room—not without stumbling over the foot of his comrade's bed, and wondering he had not woke him—he groped along the passage till he came to the room whence the light was shining through the keyhole.

"Ay!" he thought, "those lads are still up, playing with the dice I warrant. I should like to look in and give them a surprise; but I cannot wait for that;" and he passed on, descended the stairs, and crossed the court to the chapel.

No sooner had he quitted the room where he had lain, however, than his companion, who had seemed so sound asleep, raised himself upon his arm in bed, and asked himself, "What is all this, I wonder?—'Tis mighty secret!—The book to be brought to him! Why not to her, if she wishes to see it?—I should not be surprised if this were some trick of the priest's own. If all the house were not asleep, I would go tell my lady. Perhaps she has not gone to rest yet; for she sits up mighty late all by herself; and no one knows what she is doing. I had better go! and yet she may not like to be disturbed, especially if she be dealing with the devil, as the peasants in the village say. Hark! there are people up and about! I will go and tell her, if she be waking. She can but say I am over zealous; and if it

should prove all a trick of the priest's, I may get a broad piece for my news."

These meditations, though short and connected here, were somewhat slow and disjointed, as they really presented themselves, to the man's mind, so that the page who had been sent to Chazeul was in the saddle and away, before they had come to a conclusion, and his comrade had begun to dress himself. When he had managed to get on the greater part of his apparel, however, he approached the door, and like the lad who had gone before, made some mental remarks upon the light which streamed from the room tenanted by his fellow servants, and which was now much more visible as the door by this time stood open, and the rays poured full out into the passage. He looked in as he went by, and, seeing the chamber vacant, took the lamp that stood upon the table to light him on his way.

The apartments of Madame de Chazeul were quite at the other side of the house, so that he was long in reaching them; for, in the mansions of those days, the architects had displayed all their skill in distributing the cubic space contained in any given building, into as many stairs and passages as possible, so that its tenants, unless they restrained themselves to one especial part, might never want exercise in arriving at the rest.

The anteroom door was at length reached; and, tapping gently, for fear of startling the inmates, the man was surprised to find his summons answered instantly by one of the marchioness's maids fully dressed, but pale in the face with drowsiness, and heavy about the eyes.

"Can I speak a moment with madame?" asked the servant in a low voice.

"Oh, yes, Pierre," replied the woman. "She expects some of you. I thought you would never come."

The man began to fancy he had made a mistake, and that Madame de Chazeul had really sent the priest to the page: so that he would now willingly have retreated; but the maid continued, "Come in! come in!" and another who was sitting at a frame embroidering, rose and went to the inner room to tell the marchioness that "Pierre was come."

"Pierre!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "what has he to do with it? Bring him in, however. This must be some other affair. What now, Pierre?" she asked, fixing her keen, vulture-like eyes upon him as he was brought forward, and signing her maids to close the door. "What seek you here so late?"

"Why, so please you, madam," replied the servant, "I was not sure that all was right, and thought it better to tell you what was going on, because you once told me—"

The marchioness waved her hand impatiently, exclaiming, "What is it? what is it? Cease your prefaces! What brought you hither?"

"Why, madam, father Walter, the priest," answered the servant, "stole up just now to the room where the boy Philip and I are lodged. Not a word did he say to me; but he woke Philip, and when I roused up at the sound of voices, for I was but in a dog's sleep, I heard him give the page a message from you, madam."

"From me?" cried the marchioness, her eye glowing like a coal with anger and eagerness. "Well, what was the message?"

"That he was to ride instantly back to the château, madam," replied the man, who easily divined from his mistress's face that all was not right; "and to bring hither, before nine to-morrow, a Book of Hours from the room Mademoiselle Helen used to occupy."

"Did he say that?" demanded the marchioness vehemently. "Did he use those exact words—'that she used to occupy'?"

"Yes, madam, just that," answered Pierre. "I marked that shrewdly, for he said those words very slowly; and what made me think it altogether strange was, that though he said you wanted to see the book, he told Philip to bring it direct to him."

"Ha!" cried Madame de Chazeul. "So! Is it so?—Well. You have done right, Pierre, and shall be rewarded. Come hither at daybreak to-morrow; and now go sleep."

The man retired; and the moment he was gone, Madame de Chazeul started up, and with a vehement gesture of the hand, exclaimed, "He knows it all!—She has found means to write!—Ah, how subtle is he! Who would have thought from that calm peaceful face he bore to-night, that such rage and hatred, and thirst of revenge were in his bosom, as must be there even now?—We shall have plots on foot—some scheme to stop the marriage. What can be in this book? Here, girl! Call Martin from the foot of the other staircase, bid him run to the stable and bring the boy Philip hither—by force if he come not quietly. Away! lose not a minute lest he be gone!"

The girl departed; and the marchioness went on with her own thoughts. "What can be in the book? There is something beneath this!—Or has that fool Pierre deceived himself, and knowing the girl is not there, put words into the man's mouth? Yet why send at this hour secretly?—why falsely use my name to sanction the order? No, no, he knows it all, and must be cared for. There is but one way—secure him till the marriage is over,—let my brother know nought of it,—and then justify the deed by the result."

She sat down, and leaned her brow upon her hands, closing her eyes, till the door again opened, and the maid re-entered, accompanied by another of her men. "Well," she exclaimed, as soon as she saw him; "where is Philip?"

"He has been gone this half hour, madam, the stable boys declare," was the man's reply.

Madame de Chazeul let her hand fall heavily on the table; but suddenly recovering herself she said, "Keep a watch upon the gates from five to-morrow, till Philip returns. Then bring him at once to me,—let him speak with no one; and hark you, Martin; you are a man of execution.—Get ye gone, hussy! 'tis not for your ears. Come nearer, Martin," and she whispered something as he bent down his head.

The man started back with a look of consternation, saying, "No, madam! not a priest! I cannot do that!"

"Fool! 'tis but for a few hours," exclaimed the marchioness. "Hark ye,—one hundred crowns! You shall keep him under your own ward, and set him free five minutes after noon."

"Well, madam, well!" answered the servant, after a moment's thought; "but you must promise to get me absolution, cost what it may; for it is no light matter laying hands upon one of the church,—and so good a Catholic too."

"Oh, absolution you shall have!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "from the hands of a bishop, if that will satisfy you; and, if there be any difficulty, you have nothing to do but to kill a heretic, and that will make all even. Do you promise to obey?—Mark me, a hundred crowns and absolution, cost what it may!"

"Well, madam, well," he replied; "I will do it, this once; but you must never ask me to meddle with a priest again."

"Pooh!" cried the marchioness, "'tis for his own good. He will get himself into trouble if it be not done,—and now away, Martin. See to this other business first; and then lay hold of him. Do it gently you know, quite gently, but firmly too; and be quick, good Martin, be quick."

The man retired; but he grumbled as he went, and asked himself as he descended the stairs, "Where will this woman end?—She will make one damn one's-self some day, and she care nothing about it."

In the meantime Walter de la Tremblade had returned to the chapel with a quick step, after seeing the page depart for Chazeul. His thoughts, though commonly so calm and clear, were all in confusion and agitation. The strong passions had obtained the mastery; and for a time they revelled in their conquest. He thought of Helen—of the being on whom the affections of his

heart had all centred—of the only one in all the world, the only earthly thing, on which he had suffered his heart to rest, with the intense concentrated love which he had withdrawn from all that most men hold dear. He thought of her stained and disgraced, deceived, betrayed, abandoned; and oh! how the gust of passion, like the blast of the hurricane, bent his spirit before it! He thought of her betrayer of him whom he had striven to raise, and who had all the while been blasting the only flower left blooming for him in the wilderness of life; and the thirst for vengeance took possession of his whole heart. Of her too he thought, who—loaded with every kind of iniquity, her married life stained with many a slander, her whole soul foul with sin and wickedness—of her who had used him as a tool for her purposes, and employed him to elevate the treacherous villain who, like a serpent, stung the hand that fondled it.—He thought of her driving forth, to perish, the dear unhappy child, whom her own criminal neglect had aided to cast into temptation, loading her with contumely and opprobrium, exposing her error to the rude eyes of menials and branding her for ever with the name of harlot; and oh! how he triumphed in the thought of overthrowing all that woman's well-laid schemes and cunning contrivances, blasting her hopes and expectations, and mocking her in the bitterness of disappointment!

He paused where Helen had stood between the coffin and the altar. He gazed from the one to the other; and, as he did so, each seemed to find a voice mournful, solemn, reproachful. They gradually wrought a change in his feelings, they calmed in some degree the stormy passion, they awakened higher, grander thoughts. They roused remorse, they called to repentance. As he looked upon the bier of the good old man so lately passed away, it was not alone the image of death, and all the train of sad but chastening impressions—which spring from the contemplation of mortality as from a well overflowing with admonition—that pressed upon his attention; but the memory of that old man's plain, straightforward truth,—of the resistance he had offered to the very schemes which he, Walter de la Tremblade, had promoted to his own grief and regret, brought the lesson home to his heart, and showed him the excellence of high, single-minded truth, more strongly than the most laboured essay of preacher or of moralist. Then again, when he turned towards the altar, and looked towards the cross of Christ, and remembered the grand simplicity displayed, as an example, by the Saviour of mankind, oh! how poor and vain, how sullied and impure, how dark and criminal, seemed the highest effort of the human intellect when used to mislead

and to deceive! Truth, truth, almighty, everlasting truth, seemed before him in all its God-like radiance, and it overwhelmed him with shame and confusion.

We have seen him before, stand there and feel sensations somewhat similar; but it was then merely as the glimmering streak of dawn, showing where the day will be: and now it was the risen sun. The chastening hand of grief had swept away the darkness from his mind, and all was terrible light.

As such thoughts rushed upon him: as the eye of heaven seemed to look into his soul, detecting there vanity, pride, ambition, selfishness, deceit, the higher qualities that were within him, bowed down his heart in humiliation at the discovery of so much which he had never dreamt of; and, kneeling before the altar, he poured out the anguish of his soul in prayer.

He was still kneeling, when he heard steps in the chapel; but he heeded not; and still he went on murmuring in a low tone the words of penitence and supplication. The steps came nearer and then paused; but still, for several minutes, he remained bowed before the cross. When he rose, however, he saw three of the servants of Madame de Chazeul standing close to him; and he asked, "What do you seek, my children?"

They all hesitated; but at length the man Martin, putting out his hand, grasped the priest by the arm, saying, "We have orders, father Walter, to put you in confinement for a time."

"Ha!" said father Walter, surprised, but calm. "By whose orders, my son? I did not know that there was either bishop, cardinal, or inquisitor here."

"No, nor is there," answered the man: "but our orders are from our mistress; and we must obey them."

"To the ruin of your own souls," asked father Walter, "will any of you dare to drag a priest from the altar?"

"We must do as we are bid, good father," replied the man; "the sin is hers, if there be any."

"But the fire will be yours," replied the priest, "and her sin will not deliver you."

"It is no use talking, sir," continued the man; "we have sworn to do it, and so we will. 'Tis but for a few hours; and you may choose where we shall take you to. Shall it be to your own room?"

"No," answered father Walter, "no; if this act be needful to your mistress, why not keep me here, where I have promised to stay till the hour of matins? I shall be as safe here as anywhere else."

"No, no, that will not do," replied the man; "the chapel will be wanted."

"Well, then, as near as possible," said the priest: "aggravate not your offence, my son,

by dragging the servant of God from His temple. I will stay here in the sacristy. At all events, I shall be still within the sacred precincts, and near the body I have promised to watch."

The man hesitated; but father Walter, assuming a higher tone, exclaimed, "If not—Stand back, while I pronounce upon you all, the anathema you so well deserve, and deliver you over to perdition with her who sent you."

"Stay, father, stay!" cried another of the men; "we will have none of this, Martin Gournay. If the reverend father chooses the sacristy, we will not have him thwarted. It is bad enough to do it at all. It must not be made worse than it need."

"Bad enough, indeed!" replied the priest; "and heaven forgive you for listening to the voice of man, rather than that of the church."

"Well, well," said Martin, "I do not care: let it be the sacristy. But I must see that it is all safe;" and, opening the door, he went in, followed by the priest and the other two men.

"Ah, there is a way out!" he cried. "I must have the key of that lock, good father."

"There it hangs," replied father Walter with a smile: "make it all sure. But, remember, that there is another key in the hands of the church, which may lock the door of heaven against you, if you do not repent."

The man Martin, however, tried the door which led out through the walls into the country; and, finding it locked, he took the key from a hook above, and ascertained that it fitted. Then, putting it into his pocket, he turned to the priest, saying, "I am very sorry to do this, father; but it is not with my will, and I must obey my orders. They shall bring you some food and wine; and there is a lamp. At noon to-morrow you shall be free."

Father Walter bent his head gravely; and the three men withdrew, locking the sacristy door after them, and taking the key. The moment they were gone, he rose from the seat in which he had placed himself, and laughed with a bitter mocking tone.

"The fools!" he cried; "do they think I leave myself so unprotected? I must be quick! Can she have discovered Helen?—impossible—impossible!—I heard her lock the door! I must be quick!—Yet, no! he spoke of sending food and wine. I will let them return. They will come, if it be but to see that their prisoner is safe. Perhaps, too, they may linger in the chapel," and he resumed his seat; and, taking up a book of prayer, continued to read for several minutes.

"Would they would come," he murmured, at length. "Helen said, Estoc would return for her at three, and it cannot be far short of that hour."

But the tumultuous feelings which had been lately busy in his bosom, had filled the last hour with so many thoughts, that time had lost all power of measuring them; and the clock struck two, as the words were on his lips. The next moment, the door leading to the chapel opened suddenly, and the man Martin entered with a salver, bearing some food and wine. His eye instantly glanced to the priest; but the quiet attitude in which he sat, with the book upon his knee, satisfied the servant that all was secure; and, placing the provisions on a table, he was about to retire, when father Walter stopped him, saying, "Pray, do you know—and, if so, may you tell me—what is the cause of this conduct of Madame de Chazeul? I would be glad to think that, either through some error, or at the instigation of some malevolent person, she has committed this outrage, and not from mere caprice and wanton passion."

"Oh, no, father!" replied the man: "but it seems, you sent one of our people to Chazeul for a book, in her name. I know not much about it: but, I believe, Pierre went and told her what he had heard—so one of the girls said."

"A mighty offence!" observed the priest gravely; "and a reasonable cause for an act which she will repent to the last day of life. Heaven grant she may not regret it even longer;" and, thus saying, he commenced reading the book again.

"Why," rejoined the man, willing to justify his mistress, and, through her, himself; "she feared, I fancy, that you were inclined to meddle with some of her plans, and she is not fond of seeing them marred."

"God will mar them, if they be evil," replied the priest; "and no one can mar them, if it be His will they should succeed. But, 'tis well, my son, 'tis well: good-night!"

"Good-night, father," answered the servant, and left him, taking the same precaution as before of turning the lock and withdrawing the key, lest any one should open the door from the side of the chapel. Father Walter instantly rose, and put his ear to a small round hole, like the mouth of a tube, at the side of the door. The servant's steps were distinctly heard passing down the nave of the chapel, and then suddenly became faint as they issued forth into the court. The priest listened for a moment longer; but no other sound was heard.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EVIL MOTHER.

THE morning broke clear and fair; a few light clouds indeed hung about the eastern sky, but only sufficient to catch the rays of the rising sun, and gather them together, in a more intense glow. But these were soon dispersed; and the sky beamed, within five minutes after the break of dawn, in clear and unclouded beauty. Those clouds, however, were still hanging over the verge of heaven, and not above half the disc of the orb of light showed itself above the horizon, when the Marquis de Chazeul, full dressed, left his own apartments, and hurried to those of his mother. As he went, the sound of a hunting horn was borne upon the wind to his ear; and pausing for a moment, with all that fierce, tenacious jealousy of the rights of the chase, which was entertained by the old feudal nobles of France, he muttered, "It must be a bold man, or well accompanied, to hunt so near the Château de Marzay. This must be seen to;" and striding on, he entered his mother's anteroom with very little respect for the half-completed toilet of her maids.

The marchioness was still in bed; but, according to the custom of the day, she made no scruple of admitting any one who came in that situation; and her son was speedily at her bedside. "Well, Chazeul," she said, with a shrewd smile, "the thing is done, I find; but tell me all about it. You did not disturb her I suppose?"

"No," answered Chazeul, "I found everything as still as death; and so I left it. I might have been tempted, indeed, to look in between the curtains, if I had had light enough to see my fair bride as she lay slumbering. I was afraid she might wake too."

"No great matter if she had," replied Madame de Chazeul. "The priest was not in his chamber; and the girl Blanchette would have been discreet."

"I don't know that," replied Chazeul.

"You don't know what?" demanded the marchioness.

"I don't know that you are right in either the one or the other," answered her son; "for, as I went in, I certainly heard a noise in the next room, as if some one were locking the door, and there was a light, too, came through the keyhole. Then, as to Blanchette, she seemed to be seized with a sudden fit of perverseness. It cost me a full hour and a hundred lies, to persuade her to do as she was bid."

"The hour's time was a loss," observed his sweet mother; "as to the lies, that was no great expense. They are money easily

coined. But I will teach that girl obedience before I have done with her. The hussy! it was but to enhance the price.—The priest in his room!—Ay, so he might be. Now I recollect, he was wandering about at that hour. And now, my dearly beloved son, between you and me, your absence for the next two or three hours, might be more advantageous than your presence. I have got to communicate your delinquency, you know, to my good brother, De Liancourt—in other words to tell him—ay, and prove to him too, that you have been seen creeping in and out of fair Rose's chamber at midnight; and it is ten to one that his first indignation falls upon you. That must have time to cool before you make your appearance; and in the meantime there is plenty to be done."

"Oh, I can find occupation," replied Chazeul. "There are men hunting in the forest; and I should much like to see who they may be. I will mount, and take some half-dozen men with me, to reconnoitre; and if I do not find them too strong, I will hunt them as fiercely as ever they chased deer."

"Take care of ambuscades," cried the marchioness. "No, no, Chazeul. Better leave them alone till after the wedding. We have got other things to do. We must have a priest to bury the dead, and marry the living."

"How so?" exclaimed Chazeul, in some surprise; "is not father Walter here?"

"Ay, he is here," answered the marchioness, "but I suspect the good man is not well enough to appear before noon."

She spoke with a meaning smile; and her son demanded, "What is it you mean, mother of mine? There is something in your eye."

"Nothing but rheum," rejoined the marchioness. "However, if you needs must know, father Walter has discovered your folly with his niece Helen.—That is all."

"Pardi!" exclaimed Chazeul. "What is to be done now?"

"Nothing," answered the marchioness. "I have provided for him. He is sick, you know. He is ill, and unable to leave his chamber till after the wedding. Let that suffice, my son."

"It will suffice for me, my most sagacious mother," replied Chazeul; "but will it suffice for others?"

"As I will manage it," said Madame de Chazeul. "At all events, it was the only step to be taken, without making him sick indeed; and that I had no time to consider. But it seems that, last night, after all the world were sleeping, but you and I and half-a-dozen others, he thought fit to send my page, Philip, to Chazeul, to bring a Book of Hours belonging to the girl Helen from her

room, and in my name too.—What is in it I know not; but I shall soon see, I trust, Chazeul, you have not been fool enough to write anything in the book; but if you have, that fire must prove your friend, and conceal your stupidity. The same element has proved serviceable to you before; for never did a green boy at college, put himself more completely in the power of an artful courtesan, than you did, by your pastoral epistles, in the power of Helen de la Tremblade. However, if they can decipher smoke and ashes, they may prove the contract. If not, it is dissolved.”

Nicholas de Chazeul winced under the infliction. He was not one to bear easily the charge of folly even from his mother. Vice she might have charged him with at will; sin, crime, he would easily have borne; but weakness, foolishness, were accusations, against which all the vanity of his heart took arms; and his cheek grew red, his brow heavy, while he answered, “Perhaps not so stupid as you think, madam. It was necessary to keep the girl quiet. I wrote nothing in any book, however; and perhaps, after all, you may yourself be deceived, and the priest know nothing about it.”

Madame de Chazeul shook her head, replying, “Too surely!—I have been guilty of a folly as well as you, boy; and gave way to anger when I should have dealt more patiently. What is done, however, is done; and the only thing that remained, was, for me to cure one sharp act by another.—But let us talk no more of these matters. There lies the priest; and there he must lie till you are married. I will deal with your uncle and sweet Mademoiselle Rose, and you must do your part.”

“And pray, will your sagacity let me know what my part is to be?” asked Chazeul; for be it remarked, that he always spoke in a somewhat jesting and irreverent tone to his excellent parent, even while he was most implicitly following her impulses.

“It is an easy one, my son,” replied the marchioness. “First you must go down to the village, and engage the curé to come up hither for the double duty that is to be performed. There is the old man to be buried. That had better take place at nine; and there is the young man to be married, which must be done before noon. He will of course speak of father Walter, and say, it is his office to bury or marry all that die of the line of Liancourt; that he has special rights and privileges in the Chapel of Marzay, with which none can interfere, and more to the same purpose; but then you must put on a sad and solemn face, and answer that the good father was to have performed both ceremonies, but that this last night, by too much watching, prayer and fasting by the corpse,

he has fallen grievously ill, and has taken to his bed. Doubtless he will wish to see him when he comes up here, between the funeral and the wedding; but father Walter can get some refreshing sleep about that time; and ’twould be a sin to wake him.”

Chazeul laughed. “You are armed at all points, I see,” he answered; “but if, after all, Rose should show her refractory spirit at the altar, it will then be matter of regret and difficulty too, that we have not some one in our interest to go on quietly with the service, without having very fine ears for objections.”

“As to the regret,” said the marchioness, “that is soon swept away. There was no way of avoiding what has been done. I know father Walter; and with him, when once his interests are opposed to yours, there is no way of dealing, but by force against wit. We are all very clever, Chazeul; and by experience of the world, we gain a certain degree of skill, like that of a village quack-salver; but a priest has a regular education in outwitting all the world, and a diploma to do it. Then for the difficulty, the curé is a good man—an excellent good man. Let him speak to me; and I will give him such reasons for thinking it best Mademoiselle d’Albret should be your wife, that he will make you one, whether she says ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ I warrant.”

“Well, all this will but occupy a short space,” answered Chazeul; “and, therefore, if I am to be out of my uncle’s way till his passion be cooled, pray tell me by your cabalistic art, when I may calculate that his vicinity will be safe; for I know not that I can play my part with him as well as I did with our fair Rose yesterday.”

“Ay! you did that well,” rejoined his mother, with an approving nod; “but you must not be back till near eleven; or if you be, you must keep your chamber as if afraid to appear. When you do, you must be mighty penitent, hear all his censure with deep humility, express your grief in broken words and sentences, that mean more than they say; never deny your crime, but plead temptation. That will be all easily done, when the first storm has blown over, especially when you are there ready to make the best atonement in your power, for any wrong you may have done the lady’s reputation. What can be expected more? But there is one thing more to be considered. That old marauder, Estoc, was still at the village yesterday. I like it not; I know not what he wants: you must be on your guard! He may have designs we know not of. He certainly aided De Montigni and Rose in their escape. He may think Nicholas de Chazeul, a prize worth keeping in his hands,—a comfortable hostage for her marriage with the boy he loves so well. Before you venture

into the village, send down and see if he be still there, and if he be, have the curé brought up to you.—But go not too near.”

“Oh, I fear him not!” replied Chazeul; “he would never dare to draw a sword against me, under the very walls of Marzay. No fear, no fear, dear mother. But I will be cautious for the present. The men of Chazeul must soon be back, if all their throats be not cut, as, by my faith, I am tempted to think they must be, by their long stay; and when they return, I will drive the old wolf out of his lair at the lance’s point. I have not forgotten him. But the delay of these men puzzles me.—They had strict orders to return as soon as a battle was lost or won.”

“They may have been driven back with Mayenne across the Seine,” replied Madame de Chazeul; “or towards Houdan and Versailles; and are not able to force their way across. Besides, you know the Bailli loves adventures, and is not unfond of plunder. He may have some private enterprise in hand.”

Chazeul shut his lips close. “He shall pay for it, if he have neglected my commands at a moment of need, for any scheme of his own,” he said. “But I will go, good mother, and leave you to your devices. Fear not for me; I will take good care;” and thus saying he left her to pursue her tortuous plans to their consummation.

He himself was soon upon his horse’s back, and down the slope; but ere he lost sight of the protecting walls of the castle, he sent one of the men who followed him, to inquire whether Estoc and his party were still in the village, riding slowly on with the rest. The attendant returned in about ten minutes, bringing intelligence that the place was clear.

“Monsieur Estoc,” he said, “marched this morning an hour before daylight; having, it seems, received tidings in the night which hurried his departure. The cottager whom I spoke with, told me that he believed those tidings were, that some bands were coming up from the side of Chartres.”

“The Bailli and our own people, on my life!” replied Chazeul; “or he would not have hurried away so soon. Which way did he go? I will have him pursued if they arrive in time.”

“Towards Mortagne,” answered the servant; “at least, so the man said.”

“Did you hear aught of these hunters?” demanded his master.

“They did not pass through the village, sir,” was the reply, “but they were seen upon the edge of the wood by some of the people, and seemed somewhat strong in numbers.”

“Then we must be strong ourselves, before we deal with them,” observed his master, and rode on straight to the priest’s house in

the village. He found the worthy curé at the door of his dwelling—a stout, round-faced, well-fed ecclesiastic; and, as so often happens in life, none of the objections or difficulties, against which answers had been prepared, were made. The priest merely expressed his sorrow that father Walter, his reverend friend, was unwell; and, knowing that both at funerals and marriages much good eating and drinking seldom failed to take place, he agreed to perform both ceremonies with equal pleasure.

Well was it for the Marquis de Chazeul, that Estoc was not aware of his visit to the village; for the old soldier was not as far off as he imagined; and had he known that such a prey was near, it might have been long before the walls of Marzay had seen their lord’s nephew within them again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BOOK OF HOURS.

SATISFIED that the presence of Helen de la Tremblade in the château, had not been discovered, father Walter sat in the sacristy without any effort to quit it, although, as the reader must have divined, from his words, it was in his power so to do, notwithstanding all the precautions of Madame de Chazeul’s servants to prevent him. I had well nigh said that he sat there calmly; for the exterior was so tranquil and still, that it was requisite to look into his heart ere one could fancy that there was anything but repose within. Calm? Oh, no! There, all was agitated and turbulent. The clear precision of his thoughts indeed soon gained their ascendancy; and the plan was speedily laid out for meeting the difficulties of the moment, for overcoming the obstacles presented to him, for thwarting the schemes of his adversaries. All confusion of mere idea was speedily swept away; but much was still left behind: and that which did remain, was the tumult of conflicting passions, the struggle between strong convictions and habitual feelings.

All that had taken place within the last few hours, had worked an extraordinary change in the sensations of Walter de la Tremblade. New perceptions had forced themselves upon him, both in regard to his own heart, and to the conduct and views of others. If I have at all succeeded in conveying to the reader a just view of his character, it must have been already made clear, that he was a man in whom strong passions and great powers of mind, had been bowed down by the influence of the peculiar religious doctrines of the church to which he

belonged—doctrines false and evil it is true—principles, which, in many instances besides his own, prostituted the highest qualities and most brilliant talents, to the support of an institution, raised upon error, cemented by falsehood, covered over with crime; but still his devotion had been sincere and strong. He had believed all that his church told him; he had given up thought and judgment to her; his own passions, desires, and feelings, had been fused into her purposes; and, if they ever were individually brought into action, it was in the course which she had fixed for them.

But as I have said, a change had now come over him; the deep well of the heart's strongest emotions had been opened; the stream had gushed forth in a torrent; and many of the delusions which had encumbered the way of his understanding had been swept away. Many, but not all. The stern attachment to the Church of Rome, and the blind submission to all her dogmas, which had taught him to believe that those who attempted to try her doctrines even by the words of Christ himself, were worthy of nought but persecution and punishment, had been brought into contest with his love for her on whom all his tenderest affections had centred—for her whom he had looked upon from infancy as his child; and they had given way. He felt that he had been led wrong; he had learned, that ambition and the love of domination were part of the creed of Rome, and that, in obeying her fiery dictates, he had supported with his whole strength, the wicked and the base, against the good and noble.—He had learned it by his own sorrows; and, although perhaps he had in some degree perceived it before, and had believed that it was only justifiable to do so, for the great object of the defence of the church, the anguish of his heart now made him comprehend that the dreadful dogma, “the end justifies the means,” is always false, and that there is no truth but in the Apostle's own words, “thou shalt not do evil that good may come of it.”

Many another feeling, many another conclusion, on which we cannot pause, rose in Walter de la Tremblade's heart and mind; and regret and self-reproach, and the dread of being hurried by the torrent of passions and circumstances into sin and crime, agitated him dreadfully. The truth and fervour of his religious feelings remained the same. Even his attachment to the church, in whose tenets he had been educated, was unchanged, although he admitted that man's vices and prejudices had obscured and perverted her real dogmas. By her he was resolved to abide; but he determined at the same time, to remove himself for ever from the temptations to evil, to which he had been hitherto

exposed; and the conclusion to which he came, in the end, was expressed by words which he muttered to himself: “I will take no further part in this horrible strife; I will but frustrate the wicked arts of this bad woman and her base son, and then, in some far and rigid monastery, wear out the rest of life in prayer.”

The time seemed short; for, of all the many terrible struggles that take place within the breast of man, there is none so full of rapid contention, as when the first convictions force themselves upon us, that all our previous course has been one grand error; and when the acts on which we have prided ourselves, the wisdom that has made us vain, the vigour that has proved weakness, the prudence that we have found folly, the penetration that has been but blindness, the meanness of our ambition, and the darkness of our light, stand revealed in their nakedness and deformity, under the bright beams of religious truth. He could have gone on thinking thus for hours, and they would have seemed but as a moment. The clock at length struck three; and the bell was still vibrating, when the sound of an opening door was heard, and then a step. The lock close upon his right hand was then turned; and the next instant Estoc stood before him.

“Ah! Monsieur de la Tremblade,” said the old soldier, “are you here? Have you seen your niece?”

“I have,” answered Walter de la Tremblade, taking his hand and pressing it with strong emotion in his own. “I have, and I know all. Deeply, deeply, my old friend, do I thank you for your fatherly kindness to my poor girl. God will bless you for it: God will reward you, if not here, hereafter. I have no time, however, to offer you thanks such as are your due.”

“I want no thanks, good father,” replied Estoc. “I promised the good man who is dead there,” and he pointed to the chapel, “to be a father to her; and as long as old Estoc lives, she shall never want an arm to strike for her, and a home to receive her. Where is she? I hope you have not been harsh with her—”

The priest shook his head with a melancholy smile. “Harsh with *her*!” he said. “No, God forbid. She is with Mademoiselle d'Albret. But now listen to me, Estoc, and let us take counsel together, regarding what is to be done. You see me here a prisoner.”

“Ha!” cried Estoc, “a prisoner? How is that?”

“I will tell you,” answered the priest; “but understand it is but a prisoner in appearance. They think I am so, but that strong door, though locked, and double locked, would melt away at my touch, as if

it were thin air. But there is much for you to learn; dark deeds are going on within these walls, which must be prevented. First, however, there is an enterprize which you must achieve, connected with my confinement here. From Helen's words I discovered, some two hours ago, that there is, in a Book of Hours lying in her chamber at Chazeul, the only letter left unburnt by that incarnate fiend, Jacqueline de Chazeul. If Helen's account be right, that letter amounts to what they call in the French law, a promise,—*par paroles de future*, between her and Nicholas de Chazeul—in itself an absolute bar to his marriage with any one else. I instantly roused the page of the marchioness, and sent him off on horseback to bring the book."

"I saw him go," replied Estoc. "He passed me, as I lay waiting under the bushes at the bottom of the hill."

"Then he is safe so far," replied the priest. "It seems, however, that the man who lies in the same room, while pretending to be asleep, overheard our words, and conveyed the tidings to his mistress. She sent her men to place me in confinement, and will, beyond all doubt, cause the boy to be brought to her on his return and burn the paper. You must undertake to stop him by the way, and to obtain that precious document."

"That will be easily done," replied Estoc. "I will set about it instantly."

"But there is more to be considered, much more," rejoined the priest. "The boy must be instructed to carry the book on to his mistress, after you have taken possession of the letter you will find amongst its pages. He must be told to say nothing of his having been stopped, but to give it to her quietly, as if he had but gone and returned; for the only way to deal with that woman, is to conceal from her closely your intentions and your power, or she will ever have ready a plan to frustrate you."

"I may tell him," replied Estoc, "but will he obey?"

"I think he will," answered the priest. "I placed him with the marchioness. To me he owes his whole education. He has ever shown himself attached with boyish devotion to my poor Helen; and she tells me that, in the hour of her indignity and shame, he merited a blow from his fierce mistress, by showing her an act of kindness. If he be but told, that he must do this for the sake of Helen de la Tremblade, I feel sure he will, at every risk."

"Write it down, write it down," said Estoc, dipping a pen in the ink that stood upon the table, and holding it to the priest. "He will believe your word sooner than mine."

Walter de la Tremblade took the pen and wrote—"Philip de Picbeau, I beseech you, if you have any regard for him who protected you in childhood and in youth, or for your poor friend Helen de la Tremblade, to give up the book which you are bringing, to Monsieur Estoc, whom you have often seen and know well, to let him take from it that which he thinks fit, and then to carry on the volume of Hours to Madame de Chazeul, without telling her that you have been stopped by the way. I beg of you also to follow entirely the directions of Monsieur Estoc, if you would merit my regard and save Mademoiselle de la Tremblade from deep grief—perhaps from death."

He signed his name, and gave the paper to Estoc, saying in a confident tone, "He will do it."

"And how am I to act when I have got this letter?" asked Estoc.

"Ay, that is the question!" replied the priest. "As yet you do not know all these people's intentions, and it is necessary that you should be informed of all, in order that you should be prepared for whatever it may be necessary to do. You are resolute and fearless, I know, and have before now done much with small means and a strong hand. You may be called upon before many hours are over, to use the sword in defence of right and justice."

"That I am quite ready to do," replied Estoc. "It is but wiles and cunning I fear, for there I am no match for your good marchioness. But let me hear, father, what are her plans and purposes?"

"These," answered Walter de la Tremblade: "some of them, I have already frustrated; but I know that, failing these, she will have recourse to force to effect the marriage of her base son with Mademoiselle d'Albret; for she has built up a scheme for his aggrandisement, which nothing will make her abandon, but death. Even perhaps his pre-contract with Helen, she will attempt to pass over by bold authority;" and he proceeded succinctly to display to the eyes of Estoc, the whole plans and purposes of Madame de Chazeul.

"But will Monsieur de Liancourt consent?" exclaimed Estoc. "He is honest at heart—I believe on my life he wishes well."

"But he is weak," replied the priest; "weak as the water of the stream, which may be turned by art whithersoever we will; yet when bent in a particular course, and concentrated within a narrow channel, move mighty machines, and carries all before it. He is now entirely in the hands of this woman. I am no longer near him to guide him and to counteract her, and you will see that he will do her bidding, like a servant or a dog."

"Force, against force, then," answered Estoc, "and I think myself well justified in using the means I possess, to bring my men in hither. The passage through the wall between the two doors will hold us all, for we are not so many as I could wish; but I will be ready to appear at the first sign."

"How many are you?" asked the priest.

"Seventeen," replied Estoc; "but there are stout men amongst us, well trained to hard blows."

"There are eight and twenty in the château," answered Walter de la Tremblade, "and some of them good men at arms too."

"That matters nothing," cried Estoc, "if we can get in unperceived. Surprise doubles numbers. All the garrison could not act upon one point. We should seize the principal avenues to the chapel before they were aware; and the count and Chazeul once prisoners, they might fret their souls to dust without preventing me from liberating Mademoiselle d'Albret. I could wish, indeed," he added thoughtfully, "to have had enough to overawe all resistance; for I would rather, if it were possible to avoid it, not stain the consecrated floor of the chapel with Christian blood."

The priest mused for a moment or two, and then replied, "And so would I. But theirs is the villainy. Your enterprise is right and just. If they draw the sword to carry out their own iniquitous schemes, theirs is the crime and the sacrilege. I absolve you of all offence in doing aught that may be necessary to prevent the act they meditate."

"It may be better in the hall," said Estoc in return, after a moment's thought. "The contract must be signed there before the marriage, and there the first scene of violence must take place. True, it is not so easy to reach it, or to retreat from it, and we are there more open to attack; but if I can contrive it I will. I must think over the means, however, and I will be early here—as soon as I have got the letter from the boy. If we can lodge ourselves in the passage before it is full daylight, it will be better. The bushes give some shelter, it is true; and they cannot prevent my entrance, so long as I possess the key; but it were better to take them by surprise."

"Far better," replied the priest; "and I calculate that if he make haste, the boy may be back here by five. It was not much past one when he set out. Are you aware," he added, laying his hand upon Estoc's arm, and pointing to a door in the sacristy, behind which the priest's vestments and various ornaments and relics were deposited, "Are you aware, that through that closet lies a passage in the hollow of the wall?"

"Oh, yes," replied Estoc, "it is necessary for the defence of the chapel port; but still

that would only lead us to the court, and we should have to pass the Corps de Garde, go through the lower hall, and mount the staircase. However, I will think it all over as I go, and lay my plan. I know the château well, and every nook and corner. We shall find means no doubt. I have taken a stronger place than this with fewer men, and more to oppose us. Ere they should carry out their scheme, I would blow in the gates with petards, and force my way to the hall sword in hand."

"I trust it will not be necessary," answered the priest. "Indeed I do not believe that there will be aught like bloodshed. Monsieur de Liancourt himself, I should think, would not suffer the sword to be drawn, especially as his heart must tell him that it is in a bad cause."

"Ay, and many of the good fellows here," replied Estoc, "would not take part against us, especially to force poor Rose into a marriage that she hates. Chazeul is little loved by any one; and the marchioness is hated even by her people. I have heard them speak of her.—But now I will waste no more time. Farewell, Monsieur de la Tremblade: I will be back as soon as I have got the paper."

"God give you success," answered the priest; and Estoc, retiring through the door, closed it after him. Then issuing forth into the country, he crept quietly away under cover of some bushes which approached the walls, till upon the verge of the wood he found two of his men waiting for him. With them he returned to the village, called the rest of his little band together, paid the cottagers, whom he roused from their slumbers, for the accommodation he had received, and rode on towards Chazeul, giving out that it was not his intention to return.

After proceeding for five miles on the way, to a spot which the boy was obliged to pass on his road from the one château to the other, the old soldier halted his men, and ordered them to feed their horses with some corn which they had brought in their bags. A vigilant watch was kept in the meantime upon the side of the high bare hill, down which came the road from Chazeul, and at the foot of which wandered the Huisne; but one half hour passed after another, and no one appeared. All was still and silent, the stars twinkling out above, and the low wind whispering through the yellow grass that covered the wide extent of sloping land between them and a wood above. The road was scarcely to be traced by the eye, except where its sandy banks, against the deep background of the trees, marked the spot at which it issued forth from the forest; but upon that point Estoc kept his eyes fixed without seeing any dark object cross the

lines, till the sky overhead began to assume a reddish hue, and the light spread gradually around. The day at length fully dawned, and the old soldier was giving his men directions to scatter themselves along the edge of the wood, and close round the boy as soon as he appeared, when the figure of some one on horseback suddenly issued forth upon the side of the hill, and came down at a quick pace, apparently not remarking that there was any one below, till he was half way to the bottom of the descent. Then, however, the boy suddenly pulled in his bridle rein, and seemed to hesitate; but the next instant, instead of turning back to the wood, he darted off to the left, with the intention of crossing the Huisne farther up. Estoc, however, detached three of his men along the low ground on the bank to cut him off there, while he rode up to deprive him of his retreat into the wood, and the rest of the party swept over the side of the hill in a semicircle, gradually drawing closer and closer round the poor page, who doubled before them like a hare before the hounds. At length he saw that the attempt to escape was vain, and pulling in his horse, he stood still till Estoc rode up to him.

"Ah, Monsieur Estoc! is it you?" exclaimed the page with a glad smile, when he saw who was his captor. "You have given me a terrible fright."

"More than needful, Philip," replied Estoc, "for we do not want to hurt you. But get off your horse, my good boy, and come hither apart with me, for I have something to say to you."

The page did as he was directed; and Estoc, dismounting also, led him a little on one side, demanding, "Have you got it?"

"Got what?" rejoined the page, with a shy look of affected unconsciousness.

"Come, come—no more of that, Master Philip!" exclaimed Estoc: "I mean the book, as you know well enough."

"Yes, I have got it," answered the boy: "but you must not take it from me indeed, Estoc, for my mistress will be so angry."

"Let me look at it," said Estoc: "you shall have it back again, upon my honour! Have you opened it?"

"No!" cried the page with a look of surprise: "is there anything in it?"

"Yes, prayers, to be sure," replied the old soldier, satisfied by the boy's countenance that he spoke the truth. "Come, let me look at it—you shall have it back, I tell you."

The page drew slowly and unwillingly from a pouch under his arm, the book with its velvet cover and silver clasps, and placed it in Estoc's hand, saying, "You promise to give it back, mind."

"Ay!" answered the old soldier, "and I

always keep promises;" and, as he spoke, he unfastened with some difficulty the stiff clasps, which seemed to be tightened in their hold by something swelling out the bulk of the volume.

"Ha, ha! you have done what the old gouv ernante could not do," cried the boy.

"What, did she try to open it?" asked Estoc, turning over the pages.

"Ay, that she did, the nasty old wolf," replied the page; "and she kept me for two hours waiting in the hall, because she did not choose either to get up and fetch it, or let me. Ah! what have you got there?"

"What I seek," answered Estoc, giving the boy back the book, and putting a letter, which he had taken from between the leaves, in his pocket. "Now, Master Philip," he continued, "take the book on to your mistress, and give it to her, without telling her that you have met with any one, or that any one has looked into it."

"She will know that, without any telling," answered the boy in a gloomy tone. "She will find out, in a minute, that the paper has been taken out, and perhaps have me hanged for stealing it, as she did Gabriel Houlot for robbing her of her gold bonbonnière, which was under the pillow of the coach all the time."

"Fear not, fear not!" said Estoc; "she does not know that there was anything in it: and it is to prevent her from knowing it, that I take the paper."

"But father Walter knows," rejoined the boy; "and he will tell her."

"No, no, he will not," replied Estoc. "But, to satisfy you, read that, if you can read."

"Oh, yes, I can!" said the page proudly; "good father Walter had me taught to read:" and, taking the paper which the priest had written, and which Estoc held out to him, he ran his eye over it rapidly.

"Have I any regard for her?" he cried, as he saw the words referring to Helen. "Ah, that I have, poor thing! and would shed my blood to serve her, if it would do her any good. The old woman may hang me, if she likes; I will tell her nothing, the tiger!"

"That's a good youth," answered Estoc; "but, read it through."

"Well, what am I to do, Monsieur Estoc?" asked the page as he concluded. "I always promised to obey good father Walter; and, as he tells me to do what you direct me, I will do it. But, what does he mean about saving Mademoiselle Helen from death?—Where is she?—What has happened to her?"

Estoc paused thoughtfully for a moment; and the idea of telling the page that Helen was in the Château de Marzay, and directing him to help her, crossed his mind. The boy's

regard for her, and his willingness to serve her and obey the priest, were too evident to be doubted; but discretion, seldom the quality of youth, was too likely to be wanting. "The priest has means of communicating with Helen, by the passage from the sacristy," he thought; "and I suppose from what he said, that he has another key of the door. But yet he might be stopped. Most likely the marchioness does not know where they have placed him. She is not one to overlook such chances, and a thousand to one she has him removed when she wakes. Then the boy's wit might be of service if he knew all. I will risk something. It cannot do much harm.—Hark ye, Philip," he said aloud, "can you keep a secret without either blabbing it behind the door to a soubrette, or carrying it about in your face as plainly as if your tongue told it?"

"That I can," answered the page. "I have learned that in our house. There have been secrets enough there within the last two years, I can tell you."

"Well, then," continued Estoc, "the truth is, that your companion in your room, heard good father Walter tell you to go upon this errand. He went directly and informed your mistress; and she, suspecting there was something in the book which she wished father Walter not to have, has caused him to be confined, locked up, so that he cannot stir."

"I will let him out," cried the boy eagerly. "At all events be on the watch to serve him," replied the old soldier. "You may in the course of this morning have an opportunity of rendering him a great kindness, if you use your eyes and ears aright, and be ready to do so whenever he asks you."

"That I will!" exclaimed the page; "but pray tell me, Estoc, where is Mademoiselle Helen? What has become of her? I am sure you know more than you say.—Oh, madame treated her cruelly—terribly."

"She is well," answered Estoc in a grave tone, "and so far in safety, that, if undiscovered, all will go right; but if she be once found by her enemies, her life will be held by a poor teure, against that bad woman's malice."

The boy cast down his eyes and thought; then looking up, he cried, "She is in the Château of Marzay!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the old soldier, "what makes you think that?"

"Why, whom should she fly to, but Monsieur de Chazeul?" asked the page.

"Fly to him!" replied Estoc in a sharp tone. "She would fly from him to the farthest part of the earth. She abhors him. She hates him. Poor, silly boy, you are mistaken."

The page looked puzzled. "He loved her once," he said in a meditative tone,

"and she him. Of that I am very sure; for I took the letters."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the other, "then you owe her some gratitude; for she would not tell who brought them, for fear of injuring you, though dear enough it cost her."

"Ah, sweet lady!" cried the boy, "that is so like her. Poor Mademoiselle Helen, I would die for her willingly," and the tears rose in his young eyes.

"Well, then," said Estoc, "watch for the opportunity of proving how you love her. You may find it soon also. Look well about you; mark every word, and yet seem unconscious; be ready to obey her in an instant; and above all remember, that, of all beings she has most cause to hate and dread, it is Monsieur de Chazeul. There is no one whom you can trust within the Château of Marzay, except father Walter, but least of all Nicholas de Chazeul. Her life may depend upon you, upon your prudence, upon your courage, and upon your quickness; and if you be driven forth, as she was, for serving her, come to me, and I will take you into my hand, and make a soldier of you—I shall not be far distant."

The boy clapped his hands gladly; but Estoc went on, "No more, my good lad, at present. Go back to the château with all speed; say not a word to anyone of having seen me; but tell the marchioness how the old woman kept you before she would get the book."

"Stay, stay," cried the page; "I am not to know that madame did not send me; is it not so?"

"Certainly," replied Estoc; "you are to forget all that I have told you, and only to remember that father Walter sent you for the book, and that you have brought it. That is all. Now to your horse's back and away."

The boy obeyed at once, remounted, and rode off.

Estoc and his band soon followed; but at the distance of about a mile and a half from Marzay, he gave the word to halt; and then turning to his men he said, "We must take to the wood, my children. Then for a short council of war; and after that for action!" Thus speaking, he himself dismounted, and led his horse through the brushwood into the forest, followed by all his companions; but scarcely had he reached the thicket to which his steps were directed, when his ear was greeted by a loud flourish of hunting horns at no great distance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HENRI QUATRE TO THE RESCUE.

THERE is a certain spirit of impatience which not unfrequently carries a particular

class of readers on to the end of the volume of a tale like the present, before they have read the beginning; and another spirit—an evil spirit certainly—which leads a second class to do no more than skim gently but swiftly through the pages, catching glimpses of the story here and there, sufficient to satisfy the mind as to the facts, but to give nothing but indistinct notions of what is called the plot itself, and no insight into the characters of the persons brought upon the stage, no knowledge whatsoever of the work itself, in any of its higher qualities. Formerly it was not so. People travelled through a work, as through a country, remarking everything that was curious and interesting by the way; the peculiarities of the people that one met with, the beauty of the scenery displayed, the wit that diversified the day, the moral reflections that suggested themselves from the objects passed—somewhat amused, somewhat instructed, somewhat improved. But this is an age of railroad, morally as well as physically, and very little is thought of, but the end of the journey, and the easiness of the coach. To get over the greatest possible space in the shortest possible time, is the end and object of every man; and with books as with countries, we go through them at a pace of forty miles an hour. Probably in time, this may work its own cure; and as ere long nothing will be known of any land when thoroughly railroaded, but the nearest and the farthest points, and a mile on each side of the road, and nothing known of books but the beginning and the end, and what a reviewer has pleased to say of the contents, people may, in time, feel a curiosity to learn more, and take trips on a post-horse, or in a jaunting car, to see what is in the interior of the country, or in the heart of the book. But railroad is the spirit of the age; it is vain to strive against it; and if the truth must be told, an author feels the same influence, and, as he approaches the termination of his tale, is nearly as much inclined to hurry on to the conclusion, to omit facts, to leap over difficulties, and to hasten the catastrophe, as the reader. But this ought not to be; for then if that time should ever return when books are really read, it might be found out, that only half the story had been told, and that there was a great deal unaccounted for.

I must therefore, very unwillingly, pause by the way, and ere I proceed with all that was going on in the *Château de Marzay* and its neighbourhood, go back to the old house of *Maroles*, where the reader will recollect that we left the young *Baron de Montigni*, in no very pleasant situation.

Too few in number to keep their assailants at a distance, if with proper implements the

enemy made a simultaneous attack upon two or three of the different doors of the *château*, the little party, within, saw no prospect before them but that of being forced to surrender on the following morning, or dying sword in hand. The latter alternative was certainly not a very pleasant one; but we must recollect, that it seems much more terrible in our eyes, who are seldom called upon in these days for such self-sacrifice, than it did to the eyes of men accustomed daily to witness similar acts. *De Montigni*, however, had still much to live for; the light of hope was still unextinguished before him; the cup of life's joy had been scarcely tasted; and all the bright and warm expectations of youth were leading him forward by the hand. To close the pleasant journey so soon, entered not into his thoughts; and yet perhaps he would sooner have died than yielded himself to the power of *Nicholas de Chazeul* and that bad man's mother. Of the former he knew little, for they had not met since his boyhood; but yet *De Montigni* was as much convinced that *Chazeul* was faithless, treacherous, and cruel, as if he could have seen all the innermost winding of his heart; and, to trust himself a prisoner in his hands, the young nobleman felt would be consigning himself to a fate much worse than an honourable death in arms.

What was to be done was the question; and, in the little council which he held with his attendants, every one gave his opinion, and advice according to his character.

"We had better wait where we are," said one of them. "A thousand to one they get frightened or tired before the morning, or that some party of our own people comes up and forces them to decamp."

"We are off the high road," replied *De Montigni*, with a shake of the head.

"If we could but send tidings to the king," said the man, "he would soon deliver us."

"I wonder if we could not make our escape by the wood behind," joined in the servant, who had accompanied the young nobleman from Italy.

"It is worth the trial at all events," replied *De Montigni*. "They can but drive us back again, at the worst; and we might contrive to cut our way through."

"If we had not lost the two horses," observed the guide, "it might be done; but, as it is, we should soon be caught."

"The wood seems extensive," said *De Montigni* in return, "and we should have a better chance of escape on foot than on horseback. They can but follow the cart and bridle roads, while we could take the foot-paths, and even force a way across the brushwood. It seems to me the only feasible plan, and I will try it. We will leave the horses behind, and an hour or two before

daylight the attempt must be made. We may get some sleep in the meantime. Two can lie down upon the floor, while two keep watch, one on each side of the house; for the man whom we saw them send away up the hill, may have been despatched for tools, to force the doors during the night. Thank heaven, there is a moon, so that we can see their proceedings. But first, let us go round and ascertain which door it will be best to use for our escape."

"We shall scarcely have light," replied the servant, "and we are not likely to get lamps or candles here."

"Then, the sooner we go the better," said De Montigni; and, descending to the hall where they found the other man on watch, they attempted to grope their way about the château, but to no purpose; for, as we have before said, all the windows on the lower storey were strongly boarded up, so that even the faint light, which still lingered in the sky, could find no entrance.

A thought seemed suddenly to strike the guide, however. "I have a bit of rope," he said, "at the back of my saddle. I always carry a piece to tie a prisoner with. We can rub a little gunpowder into it, and then set fire to it, with a pistol flint."

This plan was adopted, and though the light obtained was not the most satisfactory, as may be well supposed, it served to guide them through the long passage of the château; and, by observations from above as well as below, they found a door which apparently led into a little herb garden, surrounded by walls, bordered by the road on one side, and by the forest on the other. The best reconnaissance that they could make, both before and after the moon had risen, did not show them any of the enemy on that side; though a party was to be seen round a fire which they had kindled in front of the château, and another upon one of the paths in the rear. They therefore determined to avail themselves of this means of exit; and, while two of the men lay down to rest, propping their heads with the saddles, which they had taken off the horses, De Montigni himself, and the stout soldier who had served him as guide from Marzay, kept watch at the front and back of the house, perambulating the various rooms, from window to window. Every now and then they met and conferred for a few moments, though neither had anything to tell. All was still and silent, except, indeed, when the wind wafted the voices from the enemy's watch-fire, or when a distant clock was heard to chime the hour.

It was just after nine had struck, that De Montigni, meeting his companion at the angle of the building, inquired, "Is that the clock of Houdan that we hear?"

"No, sir," replied the man, "it is Maroles.

But do you know I was just thinking, that, if we try to escape, we had better do it at once, or at least not very late, for the clock that reaches our ears, will reach theirs too, and may put them in mind that there are axes and saws to be procured at Maroles. Then by dividing their men, they might break in without our being able to prevent them. In such a clear night as this, the moon will give them quite light enough for their work."

"Or to see us make our escape," replied De Montigni.

"Ay, but in less than half an hour," said the man, "she will be round on this side of the house; and then the whole shadow of the château will be cast over the garden, and the door that leads to it."

"True, true," answered De Montigni, "but a doubt has arisen in my mind, as to the escape by the garden. Shall we be able to get from it into the wood?"

"There is a door," replied the guide, "I saw the mark of it plainly upon the wall."

"But it may be locked," said De Montigni, "and I think we may conclude it is so by these people having placed no one within."

"Oh dear no, sir," answered the man, who, it must be remembered, was an old soldier. "You do not know how many things are always overlooked even in a regular siege, where there are all the wits of the army to work. I do believe that, if those who are without a place did but attend to all its points of weakness, as well as those within, there is scarce a town in all France that would hold out three days. The mistakes of the besiegers are at least as much in favour of a place, as all its defences. But the best plan will be, for one of us to go out first and see if the door can be opened, and then the rest to follow. The lock must be in the inside, and it will be easily forced with a dagger."

"That will take time," rejoined De Montigni, "but I fear there is no resource; and so it must be done. We will wake those other two as soon as the garden is in shadow, and then put our plan in execution."

It was somewhat longer than they expected ere the shadow of the château was thrown completely over the little garden; and the clock struck eleven, as De Montigni and his guide woke their two companions. All that was necessary to carry with them, was taken from their saddle bags; the little store of ammunition, which they possessed, was distributed equally amongst them; and, pistol in hand, they approached the door and quietly unlocked it.

The rusty bolts made some noise and resistance ere they would suffer themselves to be withdrawn; but, it would seem, that this attracted no attention from those with-

out, and the door was opened, showing them the neglected garden, become quite a wilderness of weeds since last it was trodden by the foot of man. It was now altogether in profound shade, however; and, although the walls were not high, and they could see the glare of one of the watchfires of the enemy flashing upon the branches of the trees, yet, being situated upon the same level of the château, the garden was commanded by no spot in the neighbourhood, and consequently they determined to go on to the gate together.

As De Montigni had suspected, the door was locked and the key gone. The bolt, too, was firmly rusted in the staple, so that they could not force it back; and the large nails which fastened the lock were apparently clinched on the other side, and resisted every effort to draw them. Nothing remained then, but either to scale the wall, to return to the château, or, by slow labour, to cut away the woodwork round the staple, and then force it out. The first plan was tried, without success, for the wall was higher on the side of the wood than on that of the road, and they consequently set to work to remove the staple. It cost them near an hour to do so, and just as they had succeeded, the sound of a horse's feet in the gallop met their ear. Pausing to listen for a moment or two, the sounds were heard to come nearer and nearer, and then rose up the buzz of several voices speaking.

"Now or never," said De Montigni, pulling back the door, and the next instant he stood under the branches of the wood. The men followed him silently, and after one glance to the right, where, through the leafless trees, they caught the faint glare of the fire upon the road, they crept silently away to the left, taking the narrowest paths they could find, and looking anxiously round on every side, in expectation of seeing some party of the enemy. Ere they had proceeded far, they heard a loud hollow sound, as of blows struck upon a door, and De Montigni's servant whispered to his master, "We must be quick, sir, we must be quick; for they have got axes, and are breaking in. Our flight will soon be discovered."

De Montigni hurried on at a more rapid pace, and for near an hour nothing indicated that they were pursued. At the end of that time, however, the young nobleman began to suspect that the path they were following led them round, and was conducting them back towards the spot whence they had set out.

"I think so too," replied the guide to whom he expressed his doubts; "the moon is travelling that way, and yet you see we have not got farther on the left."

"More on the right," said De Montigni, "which would be the case if we were coming nearer to the château again. Let us direct our course from her. That must take us to the edge of the wood."

The attempt was more easy than the execution, for the paths were perplexed and intricate, formed apparently for the purposes of the chase, or perhaps by the beasts of the forest themselves, and displayed little consideration of the direct line from one spot to another. Thus very often when they had followed one road, which led for some way in the direction that they wished to pursue, it suddenly turned off to the right or left, flanked by thick and tangled underwood, without any fresh path presenting itself to enable them to pursue their course. In this devious way they wandered on through the forest labyrinth, till at length the sound of loud voices shouting, and horses galloping at no great distance, showed them that their escape was discovered, and that they were pursued. At this moment they were in a narrow tangled path up which it was impossible for a horse to force its way, and the guide putting his hand upon De Montigni's arm, whispered, "Halt here, sir, and let them pass us."

The advice was good, and De Montigni followed it. In a few moments the sounds were lost again, and with cautious steps they resumed their course towards the edge of the wood. The moon had now, however, gone down behind the neighbouring hill, and looking up into the sky to see if they could fix on any star, by which to guide themselves, they saw a reddish light spreading overhead and increasing in intensity every moment.

"Can it be yet dawn?" asked De Montigni.

"Oh no, sir," replied the guide. "I don't know what that can be, unless they have set fire to the château to give them light to look for us."

"Just like Chazeul's people," said one of the others; "it is that depend upon it; but here is the open country."

And so it proved, for they had now reached the farther side of the wood; and stretching out before them, lay a wide but gentle slope, descending towards the valley of the Eure, over which the flames of the castle shed a red and fearful light. Some trees, however, advancing from the rest of the forest, which had once been more extensive than it now was, promised them some shelter from the eyes of their pursuers, while the spire of a small church was seen at the distance of about a mile and a half; and, weary of wandering in the wood, gliding for some way under its edge, they approached the scattered trees, and began the descent into the valley.

Ere they had proceeded half a mile, how-

ever, the blast of a trumpet sounded, and a party consisting of three horsemen was seen riding down towards them. It was now evident that they were discovered, but still the pursuers did not venture to approach too near. And, pistol in hand, determined to sell their lives dearly, the little body of fugitives hurried on towards the church, hoping to find some village near, where they might obtain assistance or shelter. Still the trumpet sounded, however; and, in a few minutes, another party was seen coming rapidly round from the farther side of the wood, to join the cavaliers who were keeping them in sight.

The flames of the castle could now be distinguished; but the fire was evidently decreasing, so that they had still some hope of darkness befriending them once more; but as the east opened upon their sight, at the turn of the hill, the grey streaks of dawn were observed depriving them of that chance. The church, too, which was now near at hand, displayed no houses around it, and was little more than a chapel in the open country, erected for the benefit of the neighbouring peasantry. A deep wide porch, however, or rather gateway, with a stone seat on either side, presented itself as they hurried on, and there De Montigni determined to make a stand, sheltered, as his men must be on three sides, from the attack of the enemy.

The party who pursued now amounted to twelve, and were at the distance of somewhat less than two hundred yards; but the rest of the troop were seen riding rapidly down the hill, and the others halted, ere they made their attack, to let the whole force come up.

Suddenly the body in the rear, to the surprise of the young baron and his companions, halted, and one man at furious speed detached himself from the rest, and, galloping down to those below, seemed to make some announcement, which changed the whole course of their operations. Instead of advancing against those whom they had so pertinaciously pursued, every man turned his rein, and setting spurs to his horse's flank, sped up the hill towards his comrades.

"What can be the meaning of this?" exclaimed De Montigni.

"They see some party of our friends," replied the guide stepping forward; and De Montigni advancing likewise, and turning his eyes towards the Eure, perceived a confused group of forty or fifty persons on horseback, followed by a number of others on foot, and some twenty couple of dogs. They were advancing at a slow and tranquil pace, so that the young nobleman and his followers had full time to contemplate them. At their head, rode a gentleman in a common hunting dress, with a large white plume in his hat,

and a white scarf over his shoulder; and, after gazing for a minute, the guide touched De Montigni on the arm saying, "The white plume, the white plume!—It is the king!" and, rushing out, he cast his hat up into the air, exclaiming, "Vive le Roy! Vive Henri Quatre!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

DE LIANCOURT DECEIVED.

THE moment her son had left her, Madame de Chazeul rose and began to dress herself in haste; but although she grumbled at her sleepy maids for their slowness, and called them by many an unpleasant name, which indeed she was not a little accustomed to shower upon every one who approached her, when her eager impatience prompted; yet the strong spice of coquetry which remained with her, as a relic of former passions, did not suffer her to conclude the arrangement of her dress without the aid of the various cosmetics she was accustomed to employ, and many a touch of that pigment which had obscured the real colour of her skin for years. Thus, from the dawn of day, what between her conversation with Chazeul, and her devotion to the toilet, at least an hour and a half had passed away before she was ready habited, in deep mourning, to appear in the hall of the castle.

"Now, call Martin to me," said the lady as soon as the whole structure was complete; "be quick for once, jade. You will drive me mad this morning, with your idle sloth."

"The boy Philip, madam, is waiting in the anteroom," replied the soubrette; "would you please to see him first, or Martin?"

"Why, in the name of Satan, did you not tell me he was here?" demanded Madame de Chazeul. "Call him in, hussy."

"He has just come, madam," said the girl, willing to justify herself; "he put his head in as I went for the wimple."

But the marchioness did not always confine the punishment of offences to the tongue; and she pushed the girl rudely by the shoulder, exclaiming, "Call him in, I say!"

The maid ran to the door, and shouted, "Philip, Philip! my lady says, come in."

The boy instantly approached with the book in his hand, saying, "Here, madam, are the Hours. I suppose they are the right ones, for the old woman would get them herself. I should have been back a long while ago, but she kept me waiting in the hall, and—"

Snatching the book from him as he came near, the marchioness exclaimed, "Hold your tongue, little miscreant. How dare you go for anything without my orders?"

"Why, madam, you sent me orders to go," replied the page; "at least father Walter told me so."

"He is a liar, and you are another, I believe," cried the marchioness, struggling with the clasps, which for a moment or two resisted all her efforts.

"Ah, Mathurine could not open it either," observed the page in a natural tone.

"Did she try?" demanded his mistress, turning upon him vehemently.

"Yes, that she did," was his reply, "for at least five minutes; but she could not get it open."

"Perhaps you can do it," said Madame de Chazeul, holding out the book to him, and fixing her eye upon his face.

The boy took it, laid down his hat upon the floor, and laboured to open the clasps with all his might,—at least, in appearance;—and the marchioness, satisfied with the trial to which she had put him, called one of the maids, who, using less force and more skill, unclasped the little volume in a minute.

"Here, give it me!" cried Madame de Chazeul, not withdrawing her eyes from the book for an instant; and as soon as the maid had delivered it into her hand, she turned page after page, looking them all over, but without finding aught written on any leaf but the name of Helen de la Tremblade, in the hand of her uncle.

"What could he want with it?" she murmured; "perhaps I have deceived myself.—Yet, no! The room she used to occupy!—so said the man. Here, boy, what did father Walter say, when he sent you?"

"I do not well remember, madam," answered the page, "for I was half asleep. But I know he told me, you said I was to go, and that I must get the book from Mademoiselle Helen's room."

"Did he say the room *she used to occupy*?" demanded Madame de Chazeul. "Answer me exactly."

"I cannot recollect, madam," replied the boy. "He said her room; but I did not take much heed as to the words."

"Fool!" cried the marchioness, looking fiercely at him; "you should take heed of everything;" and then falling into thought again, she murmured, "Well, he is better where he is. If he be there, he may rage when the knot is tied, but cannot unloose it; if he were free he might stop the tying. Get thee gone, boy; and remember, when any one tells thee to go anywhere in my name, come to me and ask if they have authority."

"What, in the night?" asked the page.

"Ah, in the night," replied his mistress; "if I can give them directions, I can give thee an answer.—Now, girl, call Martin;" and leaning on the table while the maid

hastened to fulfil her orders, she fell into a fit of meditation.

Many minutes did not elapse before the man she had sent for made his appearance. And still preserving that haughty tone of command, which is so effectual with dependents, even when requiring evil actions at their hands, until they find that all real power to injure or disappoint is at an end, she demanded, "Well, is the priest safe?"

"Ay, madam," answered the man; "I have done your will, though it be against my conscience."

"Conscience!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "what have you do with conscience?—Is it not in a priest's keeping?" she added, seeing an unpleasant shade come over the man's brow; "and can he not give you absolution? This may cost a score more crowns than any other offence. But it is purchasable, and I will pay the money. To kill a Cardinal is a ruinous thing; but it can be absolved on a fair calculation of his weight in gold. These candlesticks of the church can always be replaced; and this is but a trifle. Methinks you will become a Huguenot next, and fancy that the Pope has no power to absolve us. I tell you what, Martin, if such were the case, many a fair lady and gallant gentleman, in France, would be in a perilous case."

"I shall never turn Huguenot, madam," replied the man gravely; "but, as father Walter said, 'to drag a priest from the altar is more like the act of a heretic than of a Christian man.'"

"Ay, so he said," exclaimed the marchioness, "because he was the person dragged; but on my honour he would have told a different story, if he had ordered the thing to be done. But you shall have the money. Here, Madelaine, bring me the casket.—Where have you put him?"

The man paused till one of the maids had brought in a small ebony and ivory box, and the Marchioness de Chazeul had counted out into his hand, a hundred small pieces of gold, upon which his fingers clenched with zealous eagerness.

"Where have you put him?" demanded the lady again.

"In the sacristy, madam," replied the servant. But at those words Madame de Chazeul started from her chair like one possessed.

"In the sacristy?" she cried; "then on my soul, he is free by this time! Do you know, that there is a way out through the walls?"

"Yes, madam," answered Martin; "but that door is locked."

"And that," exclaimed the marchioness, "through the vestuary and out into the court?"

The man looked confounded, and after a moment's musing he replied, "Ay, that is the way he got out."

"Out! out! Is he out?" screamed Madame de Chazeul.

"He was out, but is in again," rejoined the man. "René saw him, or his ghost, in the court, and drove it back with his partizan. But as soon as he told me, I went to the chapel and into the sacristy; and there I found the good father seated where I left him, with the book on his knees."

"He takes it very easily," replied the marchioness. "There is some new plot afoot. He must be removed, Martin; no more wandering about the castle till the marriage is over. On that marriage all depends. You know you are promised a command in my son's cornet of horse."

"I did not know it, madam," replied the man.

"Well, then, I promise," answered the marchioness, "for your good services this night. As soon as the marriage is over, Chazeul shall confirm it. But the priest must be removed to the little chamber at the foot of the great staircase. Have him away quick, before my brother comes down,—the room where old Estoc slept, I mean.—How came you to put him in the sacristy?"

"It was his own wish," said Martin; "you told me I might put him where I liked, and keep him under my own ward: so I gave him his choice; and he preferred the sacristy."

"Because he could get out!" cried the marchioness; "that was his only reason: and now, good Martin, hasten and remove him,—with all gentleness, for he is a reverend man,—yet firmly too, for he is full of arts and wiles, and will confound you with mere words. Listen not to him, Martin; but tell him to come on without speaking, and lodge him safely where I have told you. What is to be done had better be done completely. The offence is committed, and we may as well make it a secure one, as spoil the benefit by half doing. Go and remove him quickly; and then, keep yourself ready to bear witness to what you saw last night."

"Oh, I am quite ready for that," answered the man; "there I have but to say what I saw, and that I can swear to. I took care to make all sure, by speaking to monsieur when I met him."

"That was right, that was right, good Martin," said the marchioness. "You always show yourself a man of resolution and discernment. Now be quick, and see that the door be fast locked."

It may be remarked, that she spoke to the man who now left her, in a very different tone from that which she used to most of the

others whom she employed in the multifarious services required of her domestics; but the truth is, that he was of a more bold, determined, and vigorous cast of mind than the others. She had less hold upon him; she feared him more; she doubted him more; and, from the minister who holds the helm of state, down to the tradesman with his shopmen, we all show more courtesy and smooth compliance, to those on whom we have no sure hold, than to those on whom we have. It is force of character that usually gains this reverence; and it is vain for any one to say, I will acquire it; for the very necessity of seeking such an ascendancy, is an everlasting bar to its attainment. The only thing that can ever supply the place of that force of character, in obtaining station and command over mankind's esteem, is the force of principle. Every man can say, I will be virtuous and true, and, with God's grace, he may be so. Then, sooner or later, honour must follow; but he must never dream of being so, for that end; for if he do, the touchstone of the world will soon prove the metal, wear through the outside gilding, and show the baser stuff below.

Madame de Chazeul was, with this man, a different being from with the rest, because she feared he might resist, and knew if he did so, it would be with no weak and poor resistance. She spoke him fair, lured him with rewards, flattered him; but she loved him less; and the moment he had left her, she thought, "I must find some means to dispose of him, after this affair is over. Yes, he shall have a command in Chazeul's cornet. We will put him in the front of the battle; and then a blow from before, or a shot from behind may finish the affair.—Oh! David was a wise man."

After sitting before her table for a moment, to collect her thoughts, and call to mind all the particulars of the plan which she had already arranged, and which, like every other dark intrigue, had become, as we have seen, more and more complicated at each step she took, the marchioness rose and walked leisurely to the great hall. Her brother, whom she expected to find, was not there; and after waiting for a moment or two, her impatience persuaded her, that it would be better to seek him in his own chamber, where they could not be interrupted. She accordingly turned her steps thither, and knocked at the door, though that ceremony was not perhaps necessary. It was a quick and hasty knock, however, as if she had come thither on urgent business; and the moment the count's voice was heard, bidding her come in, she entered with a countenance prepared for the occasion, bearing a mingled expression of grief and bewilderment.

"Why, what is the matter, Jacqueline?"

demanded the count, as soon as he saw her. "You look scared. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," she replied in a tone of affected indifference. "I only wanted to know if you were ready; for we have much to do to-day. I wished to inquire too, what Rose was saying to you last night, just before she went to bed—for something has happened very strange."

"I do not recollect her saying anything particular," replied the count. "I said that, from what I saw during the day, I hoped she was more inclined to do her duty, and give her hand to Chazeul; and, as before, she replied, 'Never!'"

"Ay, but she must!" cried the marchioness, "and that this very day too. The girl is a rank coquette, Liancourt, and only wishes to be driven."

"No, no!" cried Monsieur de Liancourt. "Not so, Jacqueline, not so!—I dare say she might be brought to love Chazeul in time; but now she clearly does not like him, though yesterday she seemed to endure him, yet it was no very cordial companionship. It did not promise much."

"More than you think or I am inclined to say," replied the marchioness. "But one thing I will add, that if you knew as much as I do, you would be the first to force her without delay, into a marriage which is necessary for your own honour as well as hers. Ah, you do not know woman's heart, my good brother.—I say no more; but if you have any regard for her reputation and for your own good name, let no affected resistance have any effect."

"What do you mean, Jacqueline?" cried the count, hurriedly throwing on his cloak, "what is the signification of all those mysterious nods and looks? If there be anything affecting my honour, let me hear it."

"No, no! you would rage and storm," answered the marchioness, "and perhaps do some rash act towards Chazeul or Rose. But you must remember, women are strange perverse beings, brother, and you must take them as you find them, forgive them all their little faults and failings, and understand that a woman often refuses most vehemently, that which she most desires; and as to such errors as these I talk of, they are but too common."

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried the count. "Come, Jacqueline, come.—No more turning and winding. I must and will know what you mean. No one has a right to speak of my honour being in danger, without telling me how."

"But it is not in danger, Liancourt," replied the marchioness with apparent reluctance, "if the marriage takes place at once; and as for the scandal, it can be hushed up. I will give the people money,—

and, after all, Chazeul may have had no wrong intent, nor Rose either. They may only have wished to talk with each other for an hour or two in private, when every one was in bed. You saw there were secret conferences between them yesterday."

"Speak plain, woman; speak plain," exclaimed the count, growing irritated. "Talk with each other in private, when every one was in bed! What do you mean?—where did they talk?"

"Why, if the truth must be told, in Rose's room," replied the marchioness. "It was imprudent, and the people who saw him come out, and told me of it, were not sparing in what they said,—but I have no doubt it was but imprudence."

"When did this happen?" cried the count vehemently; "at what hour?"

"A little after two they saw him come out," answered the marchioness, "and he went there about one."

The count cast himself into a chair, and rested his head upon his hand for two or three minutes. Then starting up he exclaimed, "It is false! I will never believe it.—This is one of your tricks, Jacqueline."

"What do you mean, Monsieur de Liancourt?" cried the marchioness with a frowning brow. "Do you mean to say, that I speak falsehood?—Nay, then the matter is easily proved, and shall be proved. The people whom,—as I told you I should,—I placed to watch that there might be no more flights from the castle, must be called. I insist upon it, since you accuse me of falsehood. They know my son; they know Rose d'Albret's room.—Nay, more; we will have her maid. I have not seen the girl myself, but you can question her. Perhaps she will not acknowledge the truth; but you must make her. I cannot tell that it was not herself Chazeul went to see,—for men have strange fancies,—only she is as ugly as a sow. However, send for her first, and let us hear what she says. Shall I go away and let you question her alone?"

"No, no!" replied the count. "Stay and hear. I cannot believe it! There must be some mistake."

"Of that you can judge better than I can," answered the marchioness, who well knew how to manage her brother. "I don't want to lead you. I know that's quite in vain, Anthony. You never would be led by any body in your life; but, see all the people, hear what they say, and then act as you may think fit."

"I will speak first with the maid," said the Count de Liancourt; and, approaching a door which led down to one of his servant's rooms, he called to the man, bidding him send Blanchette to him with all speed.

The girl made them wait for several

minutes, during which time, Madame de Chazeul improved her opportunity, in guiding her brother's mind into the exact course that she desired. She took occasion to plead for her son's pardon, in the tone of a suppliant, but was not at all displeased to see that Monsieur de Liancourt was highly indignant at his nephew; as she argued thence the success of her own plans.

When Blanchette at length appeared, the count called her to him in a somewhat stern tone, saying, "Come hither, girl, and answer me truly. Was there anyone in Mademoiselle d'Albret's chamber last night? Don't hesitate, but answer."

The girl did hesitate, however; for Madame de Chazeul had purposely left her in the dark regarding her views and purposes, knowing very well, that the more she faltered, and prevaricated, the stronger would be Monsieur de Liancourt's conviction, that the tale which had been told him was true.

"Dear me, sir," said Blanchette at length, "who could be there?"

"Girl, you are making up a falsehood," cried the count. "I insist upon your answering straightforwardly. Was Monsieur de Chazeul, or was he not, with your mistress, between one and two o'clock this morning?"

Blanchette began to whimper; but at length, with many an excuse, and many an explanation, she admitted that it was so.

"And how dare you, you base girl," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, joining in, "how dare you give admittance to any man into your mistress's chamber in the middle of the night?"

"Why you told me yourself, madam," replied Blanchette somewhat saucily, "that I was to admit Monsieur de Chazeul, at any time, and to do exactly what he told me."

"At any time during the day," replied Madame de Chazeul, in a tone of indignation. "You could not suppose that I meant at night; and I never expected that he would ask you to do what was wrong, or I certainly should not have told you to obey him. However, for this very thing, I will take care you shall be discharged. There shall be no such convenient ladies about my son's wife."

The girl held down her head in sullen silence, very well understanding, that she had done exactly what Madame de Chazeul wished, though it suited her now to condemn it, and that she, Blanchette, having been the tool, was destined to be the victim.

"Pray did Mademoiselle d'Albret direct you to admit Monsieur de Chazeul?" asked the count; and this time he got an eager and a rapid answer, for Blanchette would have done a great deal at that moment, to damage

Madame de Chazeul's scheme, which she began to suspect.

"Oh no, sir!" answered the girl, "and I am very sure she would be excessively angry if she knew that he was there at all. I only let him in, because Madame la Marquise told me to admit him at all times, and to do exactly as he ordered me; and he would have fain persuaded me, that mademoiselle had changed her mind and liked him; but I know better than that, from what she said just as she was going to bed, and from the way she prayed to God to be delivered from him; so that she would be angry enough if she knew that I had admitted him. But he kept mighty still, and took care not to disturb her."

Madame de Chazeul's eyes had flashed fire while the girl spoke, and she had given her many a threatening look to induce her to pause. But Blanchette was not easily daunted by the lightning of the eyes; and she went on to the end as fast as possible, without hesitation or dismay.

"Ay, girl," cried the marchioness at length, "now you have committed a shameless and infamous act, and aided my son and your mistress in soiling her own reputation for ever, you would fain represent the culpability as not so great. But get thee gone; thou art unworthy of more words. Get thee gone and send my man Martin here. Tell him to bring his comrade with him."

The girl, who was by nature saucy, as well as sullen, would willingly have answered the marchioness by telling her, to call her man herself, if she wanted him; but she did not dare; and, in a few minutes after she had quitted the room, the servant Martin and a comrade, whom he had had with him during the preceding night, made their appearance. The count questioned them eagerly, and found that his nephew had undoubtedly been in the chamber of Rose d'Albret for more than an hour the preceding night. This was quite sufficient to work all the effect that Madame de Chazeul desired. He gave way to bursts of furious rage, calling his nephew a base villain who had dishonoured his house, and speaking of Rose in terms of the utmost violence, without ever inquiring whether she was to blame or not.

"Where is your son, Jacqueline?" he cried, "where is this young scoundrel?"

"He quitted the castle early," replied Madame de Chazeul, "fearing, I fancy, that this affair would be found out, and then that the consequences between him and you might be serious."

"Most likely to avoid marrying her whose fair name he has blasted," said Monsieur de Liancourt. "But he shall marry her! By

the Lord that lives, he shall marry her this very day!"

"There is no fear of him," replied Madame de Chazeul; "though there may be, regarding your fair ward, brother; for depend upon it she will deny the whole of this affair. The maid Blanchette will go and tell her, that it is discovered; and then they will get up some story between them, which they will expect us to believe. To make it look like truth too, you may be sure that Rose will affect to be more opposed to the marriage than ever; and, if it were not necessary for her reputation, it would be amusing enough not to press her."

"She shall wed him before the clock strikes noon," replied the count. "But where is your son, Jacqueline? Has he gone to Chazeul?—He must be sent for."

"Oh, no," replied the marchioness; "he has only gone down to the village, to keep out of your way till you are a little cooler. You had better leave him there till the hour of marriage approaches, and then be as lenient with him as may be. I have already rated him severely."

"I *must* speak to him, Jacqueline," replied her brother. "This is an insult and an injury to me. What did he say, when you spoke to him? Did he deny it?"

"No, not absolutely deny it," replied the marchioness; "but he did as all young men do under such circumstances. He said he had done no harm; but had only gone to Rose's chamber because he wished to speak with her in peace and quietness, which he had not been able to do during the day. It was very likely true," she added, in a tone of mock candour; "I don't think it at all unnatural."

"At all events it is ruin to her fame," replied the count; "and we must heal the wound as speedily as possible by their marriage. I will go to her and tell her, that there must be no more delay—that I expect her to be in the hall to sign the contract at eleven, and in the chapel to take the vow immediately after. I will have no excuses; it shall be done. I will go to her this moment, before I hear mass."

"No, let me see her first," replied Madame de Chazeul; "you accused me of being harsh with her yesterday, I shall be more gentle than you with her to-day. I will be firm with her, however, and let her know that you are so too. She may make up her mind to it—about which there will be less difficulty than you think—while you and I are at the funeral, which we must get over first, in order not to have the dead body in the chapel at the wedding. Poor father Walter was taken ill last night while he was watching the corpse. Did they tell you?"

"No," exclaimed the count with a look of concern; "I will go and see him."

"He is sleeping, and asked not to be disturbed," replied the marchioness; "so I sent down to the village for the curé to attend to the funeral; but I do hope that father Walter will be awake and well enough to perform the marriage ceremony."

"I hope so to," replied the count, "for if this girl makes any resistance, we might have difficulties with the curé."

"Oh, she will be more easily persuaded than you imagine," replied Madame de Chazeul; "though of course she will affect reluctance, the curé will easily see that it is all pretence. The more furious it is, the more will the affectation be apparent. So stay for me here, and I will rejoin you directly." Thus saying, she left her weak brother, who, during her absence, which was longer than he expected, worked himself into greater fury than ever, and prepared his own mind, as his sister could have wished, for any act of violence which might be required.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FALSE ACCUSATION.

It was with a quick and agitated step that the girl Blanchette returned to the room which served as her own bed-chamber and as the anteroom to that of her mistress. It was the sort of pace that, had she stopped for one moment, it must have been to stamp with rage; and, when she reached a seat, she cast herself into it, and burst forth into a violent fit of tears—passionate, not penitent; full of virulent anger, not of sorrow or remorse. The same feelings were in her heart, with which Macbeth exclaimed, "For Banquo's issue have I 'filed my mind,"—feelings which lead to fresh crimes, rather than to atonement for those that are gone.

"I shall be discharged, shall I?" asked the girl, "and all for doing what she told me. I have heard of her ways. Fool that I was not to believe it. I might have known, if I had not been as stupid as an owl, that what she does to others, she would do to me. Oh that I could but match her!—Well, I may perhaps—Now if I could get mademoiselle out of the château? But she will watch me.—Well, let her; I will watch her.—The old hag is cunning enough, but there may be others as shrewd;" and she dried her tears, and laughed at the thought of the bitter sweet potion of revenge.

"I know her now," she continued, sometimes speaking to herself in low murmurs, sometimes meditating in silence; "I know her now. Oh she can feign and speak sweet, and promise all kinds of things. But she shall not take me in any more. I can see well enough,

Her game is nearly played. If she wants any more help, she will be as smooth as oil; and then, when all is done, I shall be kicked off to die on a dunghill, for what she cares. But I have taken care of that. I have got as many crowns as promises, and I will be caught by none of the latter any more. Oh yes, she will soon come, and be very civil doubtless, if she has anything for me to do; and tell me she was obliged to speak so before her brother, but that it meant nothing. She shall see that I am affronted, however; but not too much—no, not too much, for then she might not trust me any farther, and I should miss my opportunity; for vengeance I will have, one way or another."

With such sweet and innocent thoughts Blanchette entertained herself for some time, till at length the door swung open, and Madame de Chazeul walked in, with no signs of plausibility in her countenance. The girl was sitting, with the handkerchief which had lately wiped away her tears, upon her lap; and her whole face showed that she had undergone no light emotions. The marchioness did not stay to inquire, of what sort they were, but jumped at the conclusion, that the dread of losing her place, was the cause of the girl's agitation; and, believing that, by that fear she could rule her as she thought fit, she was only careful to prevent her from thinking the post of soubrette to the future Marchioness de Chazeul irretrievably gone.

"Why do you not rise, girl, when you see me?" she demanded in a haughty tone.

"Why, I have done so much wrong, madam," said the maid with a sullen face, "in doing what I thought was your will and pleasure, that I am sure I know not what to do, to give satisfaction."

"You must do better than you have done, if you would long keep your place," replied the marchioness; "but if you really thought you were pleasing me, that makes a difference. An error may be forgiven; disobedience not. Your mistress is up, I dare say."

"Oh yes, hours ago," answered Blanchette. "Shall I tell her you are here, madam?"

"No!" replied Madame de Chazeul, advancing towards the opposite door, "we will have no farther ceremonies;" and without giving any sign of her approach, she walked straight in.

Rose d'Albret was seated as before, near the window; the favourite spot of the prisoner, where he can see some part, if it be but a glimpse of that free world which is no longer his; but when the marchioness entered, she started and rose. Madame de Chazeul had gathered her face into a frown; and Rose, who felt in her heart a deeper

degree of indignation at the events of the last night, than at all the injuries, deceits, and harshness which had been practised on her before, gazed at her with a swelling heart and a firm determination to tell her what she thought of all her conduct.

The marchioness did not clearly understand that look; and it somewhat puzzled her as to her course; but after a moment's pause, she said, "I have come, Mademoiselle d'Albret, to tell you, that at eleven the contract is to be signed in the great hall; and, immediately after, the marriage will take place in the chapel."

"Madam, you have already had my answer," replied Rose, "and I have only to beg, that you will not insult me, even by naming your son's name in my hearing. I have long disliked and despised him. I now abhor and scorn him; and I would sooner give my hand to a beggar on the road, than to one so utterly base and degraded."

"I should have thought," answered the marchioness, with a bitter sneer, "that, after what passed last night, your reluctance would have quite vanished, and that Nicholas de Chazeul would have found in Rose d'Albret a very willing—nay, perhaps, an over-willing bride;" and she pointed, smiling sarcastically, to a man's glove that lay upon the table.

"I had not remarked it," replied Rose, advancing to the table and taking it up with a look of disgust.

"No, I suppose not," answered Madame de Chazeul. "Such little oversights will occur in such circumstances, mademoiselle."

"It was no oversight on his part, at least," said Rose, turning to the open window; "the low-minded villain who left it here, knew well in that respect, at least, what he was doing; but I treat it, and him, and all his arts, with the same contempt," and she threw it out into the court below.

"Weak, foolish, guilty girl!" cried the marchioness. "Do not think to escape thus—Your fate is sealed; and within three hours you are his wife, however unworthy to be so. For your own sake, for your own reputation's sake, it must be so. However little care you yourself take of your own fame, there are others bound to be more thoughtful, and to use any or all means of saving you from the disgrace which would fall upon you but for them."

"Madam, my reputation is in no danger," replied Rose; "happily, neither you nor your son can affect that."

"Indeed!" said Madame de Chazeul, with an incredulous smile. "Perhaps your high purity is not aware, that Monsieur de Chazeul was seen last night, by two trustworthy persons, entering your chamber at one o'clock, and quitting it somewhat after

three ; perhaps you are not aware, that your maid has confessed she gave him admission to it."

"To this chamber ; not to mine, madam," answered Rose, with a look of calm scorn. "Your admirable plan has failed, lady ; and you cannot drive me into an union with one so despicable as to take part in it, even by the fear of calumny."

Madame de Chazeul gazed at her with rage struggling with surprise. "You are wonderfully tranquil," she said, at length ; "but still all your calmness will not disprove to the good busy world what several persons, independent of each other, know : that Monsieur de Chazeul passed more than one hour in your chamber last night, and that your maid admits the fact."

"I have better witnesses than my calmness, madam," replied Rose d'Albret, "who will be quite credible against your servants, planted on purpose on the stairs, and my maid, bribed long ago to betray and deceive her mistress ; and they will prove that, warned of the base scheme contrived against me, informed of all its particulars, I slept undisturbed in another chamber ; and that, if your son thought fit to pass his time in this place, he passed it here alone."

"It is the priest !" muttered Madame de Chazeul.

"I have not spoken with him, since my return hither," said Rose, who caught the words not intended for her ear.

"Who are your witnesses, then, girl?" exclaimed Madame de Chazeul. "I do not believe you ! The whole tale is false, invented but to screen your own dishonour."

"My witnesses I will produce when need may be," answered Rose, "but not to Madame de Chazeul alone ; and, for the rest, you know right well, which tale is false, and which is true. It is needless to argue with one so well informed already. Moreover, remember, that no force shall ever make me wed your son. My hand is promised by myself to him, for whom my father destined it ; and the well-devised story of his death has failed, as well as the artful scheme that followed it. I now know him to be living, as well, or, rather, better than you do ; and you may find that he is so when you least expect to see him."

The marchioness turned red, and then pale, even through the paint upon her face ; but, for several moments, she made no reply, turning rapidly in her mind every chance in the wide range of circumstances that could have given to Rose the information she possessed. Be it remarked, however, that she never doubted the truth of what that lady said ; for, though the deceitful are ever suspicious, there is something in the plain, straightforward simplicity of truth,

which raises it, in general, above doubt. Men may affect to disbelieve it, when it militates against them, but in their heart they recognise it for what it is.

"If the priest had not told her, who had?" Madame de Chazeul asked herself. "Could it be the maid?" But then Blanchette had not been informed of the whole plan. "Could it be one of the servants?" None knew more than a part. "Could Chazeul have betrayed the secret to some of his own people, who again had communicated it to Rose?" It was most improbable. "Could De Montigni himself have returned, and made his way into the château unperceived?" It might be so ; but still her scheme was unknown to him. She was in a maze, which, with all her quick wit, she could not thread ; and all that she could decide upon doing, was to pursue her plan boldly, to exercise all her influence over her brother's mind, to blind his eyes and overrule the better feelings of his heart, and to watch warily for every accident, to guard against any event, which might frustrate her design.

"It is all very well, Mademoiselle d'Albret," she said at length, in a calmer but not less stern tone than she had hitherto employed, "to set your simple assertions against facts unfortunately too well and widely known. I shall be happy to hear, when you are my son's wife, the proofs that you say you can give, that you did not commit the imprudence, to call it no worse, of admitting him to your chamber in secrecy and silence, at an hour past midnight. It will be a great satisfaction to me, and I will take care that those who witnessed the scene, and may otherwise spread the scandal abroad in the world, shall be present to hear your exculpation. But it must be as my son's wife, for your guardian and myself have consulted, and have determined, that it is absolutely necessary for your fame and respectability that you should be united to him without delay. My brother, indeed, has sworn a dreadful oath, that he will compel you to obey before noon ; and you well know when he has sworn—"

"Oh no, no !" cried Rose, now greatly agitated, "not sworn.—He would never swear !"

"Ay, but he has !" answered Madame de Chazeul ; "he has sworn by all he holds sacred,—he has called down the vengeance of heaven on his head,—he has taken the name of his God and his Saviour to witness, that he will force you to follow his will, and relieve your name of the stain that hangs upon it, by your marriage with Nicholas de Chazeul."

Poor Rose d'Albret covered her eyes with her hands in terror and in grief ; for she

well knew that Monsieur de Liancourt was one who would consider such an oath, however rashly and intemperately spoken, as full justification for violating every dictate of propriety, right, and justice. Madame de Chazeul saw her agony, and enjoyed it; for anger and wounded pride had their share in the bitter determination which she had formed, to force the poor girl into the arms of her son; and amongst the many images which a quick fancy brought before her mind of future triumphs, was the prospect of mingling misery and care with Rose's married life, and taking vengeance, for what she called the disdain of the haughty girl, upon the unwilling bride. She sat silent, then, and Rose remained with her fair face covered, hiding the tears that would burst forth, and striving to smother the sobs that struggled for free course.

Neither uttered a word for several minutes. The house and the chamber remained quite still; and then came a sound as of a key turning in a door, and next a gentle tap close to the chair where Madame de Chazeul was seated. Both Rose and the marchioness started up, though with very very different feeling; Rose with terror and alarm, lest Helen should discover herself; and the marchioness with surprise, which did not at all deprive her of her prompt decision, and ready wit. Ere Mademoiselle d'Albret could utter a word, however, in the wild confusion into which her thoughts had been thrown, her fierce companion judging in a moment that the secret was about to be disclosed, said in a low, but quick tone, "Come in!" The door from the priest's room opened, and Helen de la Tremblade stood before them, with a face calm and placid when she first appeared, but which became glowing and agitated, as soon as she beheld her enemy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HELEN CONFRONTS HER ENEMY.

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, bursting forth into a long peal of laughter, "so the secret is discovered! So here is the precious witness! So here is the wise intelligence bearer!—Strumpet, how dare you show yourself in my presence?"

"Neither willingly nor wittingly, have I done so, madam," answered Helen de la Tremblade, who had now recovered her self-possession, and spoke in a much calmer and firmer tone than the marchioness had ever heard her assume; for, in the fire of adversity,

she had gained strength, and the loss of hope had carried with it the loss of all those thrilling emotions, those vibrations of the heart, which shake and agitate the mind also. Thus, though surprised at seeing the woman who had so harshly used her, and whom,—in the long pause that had taken place in the conversation with Rose d'Albret,—she had thought gone from the chamber, she was nevertheless not confounded, and far less dismayed than might have been expected, "Neither wittingly nor willingly," she repeated, "but since it is so, it may be no better. I am, madam, as you have said, both the witness, and the intelligence bearer; but happily not the only one."

"What, minion, will you dare me?" cried Madame de Chazeul advancing a step, as if she would have struck her.

"Have a care, lady," said Helen in a deep tone. "Remember, I am not a servant, and no longer in any way under your authority, or, as you once termed it, protection.—Protection! Oh, God, what protection! Our position is different; and I bear not now, what I have borne before."

"On my life," exclaimed the marchioness, "this is admirable! Where do you stand, girl?—Is this my brother's house, or yours?"

"Your brother's, madam; but not yours," replied Helen, "and I know that brother too well, to doubt that he will do justice, when he knows the truth. To him I am now going; and at his feet I will tell all,—my own fault, and my own folly.—Ay, and your crimes, to me and to others."

She took a step towards the door; but Madame de Chazeul cast herself in the way, with a look of terrible fury. She well knew, that the poor girl had the power, if she could but obtain a few moments' interview with the count, of overthrowing all that she had done with him, of exposing her conduct, ruining her schemes, and blasting by a breath all that she most desired to see bear fruit. The worm she had trampled upon, had turned to sting her, and her only safety was to crush it.

"Stand back, minion!" she cried in a stern tone; "back to your den, this moment."

"Nay, nay, madam," cried Rose d'Albret interposing. "Helen has suffered enough; you shall not make her suffer more here."

"Blanchette, Blanchette!" exclaimed the marchioness aloud, without heeding her, but still keeping between the door and her victim, "Blanchette, Blanchette!"

The girl appeared and gazed in surprise upon the scene, in which she found a new actor, whom she had thought far away. "Quick, call Martin, and the other men from the bottom of the stairs," cried the marchioness. "Quick! not a moment!" and advancing again upon Helen, she repeated,

"Back to your den, serpent! Back to your den!"

"No!" cried Rose d'Albret, taking her poor friend by the hand, "she shall not be driven from my chamber, if she chooses to stay."

But Helen whispered, "By the other way!" and running back into the priest's room, she turned the lock and hastened to seek exit by the door at the top of the stairs.

She had, however, to deal with one quicker in every combination than herself, and ere she could unlock it, and go out, Madame de Chazeul was there before her, calling loudly, "Martin! Martin!" At the same time, she laid her hand upon the small dagger, which, as was not unfrequent with ladies in that day, she carried at her girdle. Helen, resolved to make a great effort, would in all probability have attempted to pass her at all risks; and blood would very likely have been spilt; for the tiger in the heart of Jacqueline de Chazeul was thoroughly roused and overbore every consideration even of danger. But as the poor girl paused for a single instant, the heads of the man Martin and another appeared on the stairs, and she saw that her escape was cut off.

"Now, will you back?" exclaimed the marchioness, with a triumphant smile. "Oh, I am to be set at nought, am I?"

With a sinking heart and a slow step, Helen retreated into her uncle's chamber; and Madame de Chazeul was following, when the voice of Monsieur de Liancourt was heard below, exclaiming, "What is the matter, Jacqueline? Is anything amiss?"

"Nothing! nothing," cried the marchioness. "I will come and tell you directly."

Helen sprang forward again; but the fierce woman caught her by the shoulder, and threw her back headlong into the room, muttering in a low bitter tone, "Back, minion, I say!—Stay on guard here, Martin," she continued; "let no one in or out. If my brother come, beg him civilly to pause. I will return in an instant."

Thus saying she entered the chamber; where Helen, stunned and bruised by the fall, still lay on the floor. Seizing her by the arm, Madame de Chazeul dragged her farther in and closed the door; then gazed on her for a moment, while every terrible passion that can agitate the human countenance, crossed the face turned towards poor Helen de la Tremblade. The fingers of the marchioness felt the hilt of her dagger, and the spirit of Cain moved her heart strongly; but she refrained for the moment, murmuring, "No, not blood—not blood." Then advancing to the door leading to the adjoining room, she tried it, took out the key; and hurrying

across to the other, she went out by it, and locked it likewise.

"Monsieur de Liancourt speaks, madam," said the man Martin.

"I am coming! I am coming!" cried the marchioness, and began to descend.

"Shall I wait here?" asked the servant.

"No, all is safe now," rejoined his mistress, going on; "we shall want you for other matters, my good Martin."

She hurried down without a moment's pause, endeavouring to smooth her countenance, and to calm the vehement agitation of her thoughts as she went; and although, in the latter effort, she was not altogether successful, for her angry spirit when once moved, was long ere it regained tranquillity; yet her face was smiling—though with a curl of contempt hanging about the nostril and the corner of the lip—when she met her brother just ascending to inquire the cause of the noise and outcry which had reached his ear.

"What is the matter, Jacqueline?" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "has anything new gone wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied the marchioness; "something more amusing than anything else. But I will tell you all about it after the funeral. I think it will make you laugh, to see what tricks there are in this world."

"But what is it? what is it?" asked the count, whose mind, vacillating and uncertain, was too much agitated by the course he was persuaded to pursue against his better judgment, not to feel a movement of dread at every new incident in the drama, whenever he fell back from a fit of passionate vehemence, into his usual state of weak hesitation.

"Oh! I will tell you by and by," replied the marchioness, who was anxious to have a little time to arrange her plans, and to think over the turn that she should give to all that had just taken place. "The story is too good to be spoilt by relating bits of it; and the hour appointed for the funeral is already past—hark! there is the bell. All the people must be waiting in the hall; and we must go and put poor old Michael in the vault, before we can talk of other things."

The count suffered her to lead the way to that large hall in the Château of Marzay, into which we first introduced the reader when we brought him to the house. There several of the principal members of the household were assembled, under the guidance and direction of the count's major domo; and they had already begun, with the assistance of the good priest of the village, to discuss some of the savoury pasties, and rich old wines, which were spread out upon a table in the midst of the room,

The worthy curé looked somewhat mortified at the early arrival of the two mourners, if we may so term the count and his sister, for he had got his plate loaded with a fresh supply of viands, and it was understood that their appearance was to be the signal for beginning the ceremony. Monsieur de Liancourt, however, courteously pressed him to go on, and having a capacious mouth, and ready hand, the priest brought his meal to a speedy conclusion. It may be a curious question, whether the situation of that country is most unfortunate, where the poverty of the clergy renders their appetites easy panders to corruption; or that where their wealth tends to make them the slaves of their own passions? To say the truth, it was a relief to the count to see the curé eat, for Monsieur de Liancourt's mind, more impressible than that of his sister, shrunk from the solemn scene he was about to witness. He felt higher and less worldly thoughts, which he dreaded and disliked, crowding upon him against his will; and certainly the very mundane appetite of the priest, though it formed a strange contrast with the functions he was about to exercise, was well calculated to deprive the ceremony of part of its gloomy solemnity, as, indeed, is the case with all eating and drinking on such sad occasions.

The moment he had done, the worthy man started up, wiped his knife, and put it in its case. Then turning to Monsieur de Liancourt, he said, "Give me three minutes, sir, to get everything in order in the chapel, for as Monsieur de la Tremblade is ill, probably no preparations are made."

"How is he?" asked Monsieur de Liancourt; "have you seen him, father?"

Before the curé could answer, Madame de Chazeul's servant, Martin, who stood behind her, stepped forward, saying, "He is still asleep, sir, and begged particularly not to be roused till he awoke himself."

"Ay, let him sleep," said Madame de Chazeul in a low and gloomy tone. "He will have sorrow enough, poor man, when he awakes."

The count looked at her in surprise; but she nodded her head significantly; and the priest quitting the hall, hurried on to the chapel.

The count and his sister followed soon after, and the ceremonies of the interment began. Impressive and terrible as they always are, perhaps the peculiar forms and pomp of the Roman Church, add more to them than to any other of the rites of religion. The count felt them much; the tears rose in his eyes, when he thought of his brother, the companion of his boyhood, scarcely more than a year younger than himself, who had passed through life in friendship and affection with him, but had gone down to the grave in

indignation and just displeasure at his acts. He asked himself, too, how long it might be ere that vault, which now yawned in the midst of the chapel—with the stone which marked its place, and bore the name and arms of De Liancourt lying by the side of the gaping chasm,—would open for him also; and he shrunk with dread from the sad answer. A few short hours—a few short days—it could not be longer than a few short years; and then, the dust to dust, and the spirit to God who gave it! Next came the,—what then! The terrible, what then? The dread account—the secrets of the heart laid open—the judgment, the stern, the irreversible, the unalterable decree, the doom for all eternity!

He wished it was over; he loved not such thoughts: he felt his soul shaken within him. But the Roman Catholic Church affords so many passages for escape from all those dark but gloomy convictions, which the tomb and its awful lessons are calculated to produce upon the mind of him who looks alone to Scripture for his guide—purgatory, absolution by the lips of men as frail as ourselves, indulgences, the intercession of saints, the masses for the dead—that Monsieur de Liancourt soon found means of consolation. He looked to the confessional. He thought that there he would find relief from the burden. He vowed a hundred masses for his brother's soul; he determined that he would dedicate a lamp to the virgin; and give a candlestick to the altar of our Lady of Chartres; and half his sins and errors vanished from his sight, when he remembered how easily the past and the future might be atoned for.

Madame de Chazeul felt none of these things. She maintained a decent gravity, indeed, but kept her eye fixed upon the countenance of her brother, marking the varying emotions that passed over his countenance, and calculating very accurately, the sources from which they sprang in his mind. From time to time, she suffered her own thoughts to revert to the conduct which she had to pursue; and her insight into her brother's character, with the moving picture his face displayed, aided her not a little in determining her course. Of the rest of the things around her, she took little or no heed. It was but a pageant in which she took a part; a procession in which she walked; one of those ceremonies, in which her staté and station as a mortal being, required her to share.

Too much, indeed, are we apt to go through all the strange and instructive scenes of life, as if we were automata. Their lessons are learned by rote, and not by heart; and oh! how much wiser, and how much better, should we be, if out of

everything that surrounds us, out of each event affecting ourselves and others, lighted by the word of God, we were to draw the high moral that is to be found in all His doings! Who would dare to commit wrong, if he saw the hand of God close to him in every event of existence?

All was, at length, concluded; the body deposited in its last home; the priest returned to the altar; the labourer with his pickaxe, and his trowel ready at the side of the vault, to close the coffin of the good old commander for ever from the light of day; and Monsieur de Liancourt, offering his hand to his sister, led her out into the court.

The spring sunshine was beaming brightly; a light bird, perched upon a shrub that grew out of the wall, was carolling sweetly in the warm air—the image of thoughtless life; and the count felt relieved; for it was all over, and his heavy thoughts were buried with his brother in the tomb. Madame de Chazeul too felt relieved, though in another manner, for she had dreaded the effect of what had just taken place upon her brother's mind. It was done. The sad paraphernalia of the funeral would soon be removed from the chapel; the decorations for the marriage would take their place; and it seemed to her as if a step was gained.

"Well, Jacqueline," said the count, as they came forth: "what is it you have to tell me?"

"It must be in private," replied the marchioness, "for various reasons, which you will soon see. Come to my apartments, where we sha'n't be interrupted. But first give orders about the marriage. We cannot get any flowers but violets and snowdrops: but they must deck the hall and the chapel out as well as they can. You are sure the notary will be here?—tell them to have everything ready." She did nothing without art, and even these ordinary words had their object.

The count hesitated, but her ascendancy was complete; and, after a short pause, he called some of his servants to him, gave several of those orders, which his sister knew he would not be willing to recall, for fear of betraying that weakness of resolution of which he was internally conscious, and then accompanied the marchioness to her apartment.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MADAME DE CHAZEUL'S ARTS.

It is very rarely, indeed, I believe, that human beings become, even by long habit, so

hardened in evil as to commit crimes deliberately, without some shrinking reluctance, without some moments of hesitation and dismay. The voice of conscience may be reduced to a whisper; but still, if an interval of silence occurs in the tumult of the passions, that whisper is heard. If unattended to for reformation of purpose, it does, indeed, but serve to irritate the guilty mind to more culpable excess; for conscience, by those who are resolute in wickedness, is soon ranked amongst their enemies, as one of those to be overcome by the more vehement opposition; and in its defiance they go beyond even the point they at first desired, as a fierce and hard-mouthed horse leaps much farther than is necessary to clear an opposing fence.

As Madame de Chazeul walked to her room with her brother, a momentary glimpse, a vision as in a dream, a picture like the scene of a play, presented itself to her all at once, of the complicated intrigue in which she had involved herself, the difficulties which awaited her whichever way she turned, the consequences of the deceptions she had practised, their ultimate exposure, and the contempt and suspicion which might follow her after-life, from the discovery of all the falsehoods she had told, and all the arts she had had recourse to.

For a single instant the question shot across her mind, like a flash of lightning, "If men will so judge me, how will judge me, God?" But that gleam of awful light she crushed out, in an instant, like a dying spark in a mass of tinder; and to all the rest she had a ready, and to her, convincing answer, "I shall have triumphed! That is enough! Success is justification!"

Hers was the philosophy of a great modern usurper, applied to domestic life; and the springs which moved her in many of her proceedings, were not very different from his own.

The next consideration was the government of her brother; and step by step, through the hall and up the stairs, the incredible rapidity of thought brought her to new conclusions; not a footfall but had its thousand questions and replies in her own breast, its examination of plans and results, its calculations of character, its meditation of weakness, and its application of the means to the end. Half a lifetime was spent between the court and her own apartments—I mean thoughts that would have filled half a lifetime better disposed; but when she reached her own door, her mind was calm and clear; and she entered with the full assurance of overruling all opposition, extinguishing all suspicion, working out her own schemes, in despite of every combination of circumstances against her, ay! and of

taking revenge, and closing the tomb over one of the chief sources of doubt and anxiety for the future.

The large anteroom in which her maids slept was vacant, for they were engaged with their mistress's dress in the chamber beyond ; and with a smiling countenance, as if all memory of the ceremony just past, had left her on the staircase, she invited her brother with somewhat formal courtesy to be seated, closed the door, and then began, without waiting to be questioned.

"Well, Anthony," she said ; "I thought I knew every turn and wile of a woman's heart.—I have a good right to know ; for I do not think there are many women who have dealt more in matters of policy, public and private, than I have done ;" she added these words in a tone of gay candour, which she knew would not be without its effect. "But yet I have found one to go beyond me : and, for a time, to overpower me—till I discovered the truth. When I went from you to Rose d'Albret, I found her in a high and haughty mood, ready to treat remonstrance with contempt, and evidently wishing to be pressed, if not forced, so that she might cast any blame in point of haste on us, and justify herself. Her conduct and her tone provoked me,—foolishly I will allow, and I did,—sillily enough—what I ought not to have done. I told her of the discovery we have made, of Chazeul's visit to her chamber—which I should have studiously avoided ; but I was off my guard—"

"I do not see that," said Monsieur de Liancourt : "why should you have avoided it ? I should tell her the first thing, as the motive which made me urge the marriage upon her."

"Ay ! that is very well for you, brother," replied Madame de Chazeul, "but you stood in a different position. You have a right, not only to speak such truths, but to command the only conduct which can take away the sting from them. I should have remembered that, for me to show I knew the fact, would but irritate her to resistance and denial, and to efforts for her exculpation, even to resistance, of the only remedy for the evil situation in which she has placed herself ; just as mad people deny they are insane, and refuse the medicines which might soothe their brains. In an instant, she had a story ready. She had not slept in that room, she said ; and gave me to understand that she had passed the night in the adjoining chamber. Seeing the error I had committed, I replied, that it might be so, but that the injury to her reputation was the same, and that the only remedy for that was her immediate marriage with my son."

"In which chamber did she say she slept ?" demanded the count.

But Madame de Chazeul did not wish to be brought to the point, and replied, "I do not well know ; there is one on the right, and one on the left, you know. However, I told her that you took the same view that I did ; and that you had sworn, in the most solemn manner, she should be Chazeul's wife before noon to-day."

"Did I swear ?" asked Monsieur de Liancourt, in a low voice.

"As solemnly as ever man swore," replied the marchioness ; "you called heaven to witness ; you vowed a vow to God ; and that seemed to move her more than anything ; indeed, it appeared that she was just going to say, when she found you were so resolute, that she was prepared to obey, when the door opened, and in walked,—who, think you ?"

"Nay, I cannot divine," said Monsieur de Liancourt ; "not De Montigni ?"

"No ! no !" answered Madame de Chazeul ; "it would take longer for a ghost to travel post from Chartres ; and he is dead beyond all doubt. No,—who but Helen de la Tremblade."

"Ah ! poor little Helen ! I shall be glad to see her," cried the count ; "she has not been here for three months or more ; nay, it was in October, well-nigh six months, upon my life."

"And in those six months, what events have happened," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, "to blast all our regard for her, to show her the veriest—but I will not give her the name she deserves. Suffice it, my dear brother, that not long ere I came hither, I found, by letters I discovered, that I had been nourishing a serpent in my house. I found her base, unworthy—impure, ambitious, scheming. Sickened and indignant, I gave way, as I am too apt, to the fierce burst of passion ; for I can never conceal what I feel ; and drove her out to carry her schemes and vices elsewhere. But I speedily repented ; and sent out to seek her, intending to treat her kindly, and, if I could not forgive her faults, to put her in the way of repentance and atonement ; but she had gone off at once ; and has since come hither, when, or how long ago, I know not. She has evidently been here in secret, however, for some time, prompting Rose to all this resistance, prejudicing her mind against Chazeul, whom the vain girl thought to wed herself, and inspiring her with continual schemes for thwarting our purposes. She had clearly heard all that had passed between me and Mademoiselle d'Albret ; and when she found Rose was beginning to yield, as I showed her how resolute you are, forth she came to dare me, thinking that she could frighten me by her influence over her uncle, and her threats. I believe she would have

struck me had she dared ; but I taught her, I was not to be intimidated, laughed her menaces to scorn, and gave her to understand that I would now expose all to you, though I had hitherto carefully concealed her guilt and folly from all ears—even from her uncle's. It was wonderful to see how the girl's daring spirit was cowed before a little firmness, how she shrunk and quailed. She would have fled, indeed, perhaps to brew new mischief ; but I resolved that should not be ; and, like one of the men who tame the lions at the Louvre, I assumed a commanding tone, and ordered her to retire into her uncle's chamber, fully resolved not to let her forth till the marriage is over. It was then that she tried to run past me ; but I called loudly for my people, and, finding it in vain to resist, she obeyed, though sullenly and gloomily."

"To the priest's chamber !" said Monsieur de Liancourt. "Will not all this rouse good father Walter ? Why, there was noise enough to wake the dead."

"Oh ! no !" replied the marchioness, who had foreseen that such a question might be put, and was prepared with an answer. "It would have roused him, certainly, if he had been in his own chamber ; but he was so faint and ill, with long watching, doubtless, fasting and prayer, that the people who were with him took him first into the sacristy, and then to a room on the ground floor, rather than carry him upstairs. There he sleeps quietly, and, doubtless, will awake quite refreshed and well. I only dread having to tell him this story of his niece, for I do not think he knows it yet. She looks very ill, poor wretch ; and I should not wonder if her violent temper killed her ; but, if possible, I will still keep the matter secret from all but her uncle."

"Do, do," replied the count ; "her violent temper ! Why, she was the most gentle and timid of creatures, Jacqueline."

"Ay, so she seemed," replied Madame de Chazeul ; "but vice and ambition have brought forth the natural character : and, if you had seen her just now, you would not have said that she was gentle. I thought she would have stabbed either me or herself ; and yet, it made me laugh to witness her impotent rage.—But, to return to Rose. She now knows her fate fully : for, as soon as I told her you had sworn, it was easy to see, that her knowledge of your firmness, showed her that your word was quite irrevocable."

The count looked gloomily down upon the ground ; for he would fain have shrunk from the task she put upon him ; and yet, like all weak people, endeavoured to assume the qualities that were imputed to him.

"Yes," he said ; "having sworn it, I must do it ; and it is certainly necessary for

her own reputation, after what you have told me, and what the other people saw, that she should marry him at once. It must be done—that is clear."

"Ay !" answered Madame de Chazeul ; "whether she slept in her own chamber or another. It is known, unfortunately, to so many people that Chazeul, like a rash and foolish boy, passed a great part of the night in her usual room that, for both their sakes, there must be no delay : and, besides, your word must be kept, as it always is."

"Certainly," replied the count, working himself up to the pitch required ; "and it shall be kept, by all I hold sacred."

The repetition of the oath was very pleasant to Madame de Chazeul, for she knew that her brother would not now shrink from its execution ; and that, in order to guard against his own vacillation, he would assume an air of violence and sternness, calculated to intimidate all remonstrance, and overbear all opposition. "Well, then, Anthony," she said, "as we have now but little time to spare, I will go and make some change in my apparel ; and, sending for Rose's maid, Blanchette, give her orders for dressing her mistress in something like bridal costume."

"Do you think I ought to go and formally inform her of my resolution ?" asked the count.

"As you please," answered Madame de Chazeul ; "and yet, perhaps, you had better not. I have told her already ; and, if she have no further inducement to display a headstrong spirit, we shall find her less obstinate at the time of the marriage. We shall have some affectation of reluctance, beyond doubt : but it will be soon got over when she finds you firm ; and if you then go and bring her from her chamber, it will be enough. You will thus have only one disagreeable scene instead of two."

"The fewer the better," replied the count. "But, where is Chazeul ?—has he returned yet ?"

"No," answered the marchioness, "I fancy he is afraid to meet you : but I will send down to the village, and tell him to come up, if you will promise not to be too angry."

"I must reproach him," said the count, putting on a firm and dignified air. "You must admit, Jacqueline, that he has been very much in the wrong."

"Well, I know he has," answered the marchioness. "But, however, his fault will all be done away with by the marriage, and so there is no use of saying too much about it."

"Ay, but I must say something," answered Monsieur de Liancourt. "However, go and make your preparations, for it is now past ten ; and, immediately after the marriage,

I will see Helen de la Tremblade myself, and inquire into the whole case, that I may break the tidings to poor father Walter.—'Tis very odd that she should become such as you represent; for she was as sweet and gentle a girl as ever I saw."

Madame de Chazeul left him without reply and entered her bedroom, while the count retired by the other door. But, ere she reached the dressing-table, she paused twice; and at length, after a few moments' meditation, murmured to herself, "No, that must be prevented."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE POISONED CUP.

WHEN Madame de Chazeul entered the bedroom, she found the two maids busily engaged in ornamenting a dress, which she had ordered them to prepare against the marriage. It mingled, in a somewhat strange manner, the colours of mourning and rejoicing; and the two girls were tittering at some observations made by the page, who stood, looking over their work, and who had just said, "Why, if madam put on that, she will look like an old magpie."

The boy's face was perfectly grave, but the maids could not recover a demure look quite so easily; and Madame de Chazeul, who was herself in deep and stern thoughts, gave them a fierce glance, saying, "What are the fools laughing at? Go both of you into the anteroom, and let one tell the girl Blanchette to come to me; and you, Philip, run down to the kitchen, and fetch me two basins of soup. I am hungry," she added in a tone that she intended him to remark; "and that poor girl must have some food too."

The boy hastened to obey, and the maid went to call Blanchette; but the countess remaining in her own chamber, opened a little bonbonnière which she carried, and shook out a small quantity of a white powder into a piece of paper, which she folded up carefully, but not indeed completely, for one end was left open. This packet she concealed between her first and second finger; and then, leaning her head upon her hand, she meditated for a moment or two, turning her own dark schemes in her mind, with some doubts and misgivings as to how she should carry; he next step she purposed to take, into execution.

"If I carry it to her myself," she thought, "she will doubt something, and will not drink it. I'll send it by the maid Blanchette.—Yet, perhaps, if she knows that it comes from me, the same suspicion may

arise; and I doubt that girl too. She has given me black looks and saucy answers. No—I had better take it myself; or, stay—I will send it by the page. He was always fond of her; and a light, thoughtless boy like that, one can make say what one will. He will suspect nothing, and the girl will not doubt him. Martin I dare not trust, for the fool thinks his conscience sufficiently burdened already with the imprisonment of the priest. He would not be so easily taken in either, to believe that I had any very tender consideration for the hunger of Helen de la Tremblade, any more than those two wenches in the anteroom. All my people know too much—I must get some new ones; and, if I can breed up this boy in perfect obedience, he may prove useful hereafter."

As she was going on with these pleasant meditations, the girl Blanchette presented herself, and Madame de Chazeul, turning towards her, asked in a calm and complaisant tone, "How long has Mademoiselle de la Tremblade been here, Blanchette?"

"Really, madam, I do not know," answered the maid; "I was not aware that she was here at all, till I found her with you and Mademoiselle d'Albret."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Madame de Chazeul with an air of surprise; "I thought you had known all about it."

"Not I, madam," said Blanchette; "but she can't have been there long, or I could not have helped knowing. I think she must have come last night, for I saw the door of the priest's room open just before sunset, and I looked in. There was nobody there then; and I am sure nobody slept in the room the night before; for he was in the chapel all night himself, and the bed was untouched in the morning."

Before Madame de Chazeul could make any further observation, the page entered the room, bearing the two basins of soup which he had been commanded to bring; and his mistress ordered him to set them down on the table before her and retire. The boy did as she bade him, but remained in the anteroom; and the marchioness proceeded to talk further with Blanchette, changing the subject of her conversation, however, to the approaching wedding, and the preparations for it, which were necessary.

"You will not have much time, Blanchette," she said; "but still, you must try to make your mistress's wedding dress look as gay as possible."

"I will do the best I can, madam," replied Blanchette; "but I doubt very much whether she will put it on."

"Oh, nonsense," cried Madame de Chazeul. "She knows that Monsieur de Liancourt has sworn that she shall marry the marquis before noon to-day; and she does not doubt

that he will keep his word. She must, therefore, have made up her mind to it by this time ; and I dare say we shall hear no more objections."

Blanchette shook her head, saying, "I think you will, madam, as many as ever."

"Well, then," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, "force must be used ; that's all, for my brother will not break his oath for the whims of any girl in Europe. Fetch me that mantle, Blanchette," she continued, "that one which hangs by the wall there," and she pointed to a spot at the other side of the room, where a cloak was hanging from a hook on the wall. The direction was such that Blanchette, in going thither, must turn her back to the table at which the marchioness was seated. The girl walked straight across to the spot, seemingly gazing at the crimson silk mantle before her, but as she did so, she turned her eyes quietly towards a small mirror that hung exactly opposite the fire-place. At first it presented nothing to her view, but the wide-open hearth, and the curiously carved dogs, with some large pieces of wood burning upon them. The next moment, however, her own figure crossing was reflected from the glass, and then was seen, as the angle became greater, the form of Madame de Chazeul, seated at the table with the two basins of soup before her and with her right hand raised above one of them. She was shaking in the powder which she held wrapt up in the paper between her fingers ; and Blanchette saw clearly the white substance fall into the liquid. She took no notice, however ; but in order to give the marchioness full time for what she was about, she affected to have some difficulty in unfastening the garment she was sent to fetch from the peg.

Madame de Chazeul turned round the next moment saying, "Untie the string, untie the string ! How clumsy you are !"

Following her directions, Blanchette easily got down the mantle and returned with it to the lady's side, who began a long unnecessary explanation as to how certain knots of riband were to be placed on Mademoiselle d'Albret's dress, and Blanchette took out her scissors to unfasten one of those from the cloak, in order that she might see exactly how it was done,—affecting, to say the truth, a greater degree of stupidity than was natural to her.

"There, that will do," said Madame de Chazeul ; "you must understand it now. Oh, I forgot," she added aloud, "I must send something to Mademoiselle de la Tremblade. She has had no breakfast, I suppose ? Here, Philip !"

The boy did not appear, and Blanchette still continued to fumble at the bow upon the mantle, without offering to call the page.

There was a good deal of tremor in the marchioness's manner : she was agitated : her voice shook when she called ; and at length rising, she went to the door to give her orders to the boy. He was not there, however ; and the only person in the room was one of her women seated near the farther window, whom she directed in quick and eager words to call the page directly.

The whole of this proceeding occupied not a minute and a half ; but the moment that the marchioness's back was turned, Blanchette with dexterous rapidity, took the mantle between her teeth, and, employing both hands, changed the relative positions of the two basins of soup, but was busy at the knot again, with a dull face and a heavy unmeaning eye, before Madame de Chazeul turned round. Not the slightest sound had she made ; and it was only a gentle undulation of the liquid in the two cups which could have betrayed to any eye that they had been moved. That, however, had nearly subsided before the marchioness returned to the table, and Blanchette soon received her dismissal, with injunctions to make haste with what she had to do.

Scarcely was the girl gone when the boy Philip entered the room, and Madame de Chazeul asked sharply, "Where have you been, sir ?"

"I went to get some breakfast, madam," replied the boy, "for I was very hungry, having ridden all night."

"There may be other people hungry as well as you are, young glutton," said the marchioness ; "however, here's a task for you, that I am sure you will like. Do you know that Mademoiselle Helen is here ?"

"No," cried the page with well feigned astonishment ; "is she, indeed ? Oh, I am so glad ; and I am sure I hope you will forgive her, madam, for she is so good and so kind."

"Not yet," replied the marchioness in a significant tone ; "but I may soon. In the meantime, I must not let her, for the world, know that I take any interest in her ; for she is locked into her room, and must remain there till I think she is punished sufficiently. However, she must not be without food, so carry her this basin of soup, as if you had brought it for her yourself, without letting her know that I sent it. She will take it kind of you ; but you must not stop a minute with her, and be sure to lock the door and bring me the key again directly. If you were to let her get out, I would have you flayed alive."

"I will take care, that shall not be the case," replied the boy ; and, stretching out his hands, either from some suspicion or by accident, he was about to lift the basin farthest from him, when Madame de Chazeul

thrust back his arm hastily, and laying her finger on the other, exclaimed, "This, I told you, this. Don't you see I have taken some of the other?"

The boy could not perceive that there was any difference in quantity between the two; but the quick eagerness with which Madame de Chazeul spoke, would have created doubts in his mind if there had been none there before; and he determined at once, to warn Helen against touching any food but that which he himself procured for her.

Madame de Chazeul then gave him the key; but she exacted a promise from him, that he would lock the door with it, and bring it back without suffering Helen to go out. "If she should try to master you, and be too strong for you," said the marchioness in a low voice, "use your dagger."

"Oh! madam," cried the boy with a look of horror.

"I mean, but to frighten her," replied Madame de Chazeul, "and at all events call out loudly should such be the case. I will place some one within hearing."

Carrying the soup in his hand, the page then left the room; and, descending that flight of stairs, he passed through the passage below, and ascended the others towards the priest's room. If Madame de Chazeul had reflected upon all the circumstances, she would have perceived that the boy was not altogether sincere with her; for he had affected not to know that Helen was in the château; and yet, without her ever telling him in what room the unhappy girl was confined, he went away towards it directly. But the truth is, that, as usual, the whole events of the morning had been talked over amongst the servants in the hall; and he had heard the fact of Helen's appearance, and where she was to be found.

The first sound of his step upon the stairs brought out Blanchette from the neighbouring room. Her face was as pale as ashes, and her limbs trembled, but she stopped the boy at the top of the stairs, asking in a whisper, "Which of the two basins is that? The one on the right or the other on the left?"

"The one on the right," replied the boy. "I am taking it to Mademoiselle Helen. Do you know anything about it? You look very white!"

Blanchette still held his arm, though she murmured, "That is right. Well, however," she continued, as if speaking to herself, "it will be better to be quite safe. Tell her not to take the soup, Philip; let her throw it away; and you find means to give her food that you know is—is—is wholesome."

"How?" demanded the boy. "How is that to be done?"

"Throw a ball of twine into the window from below," replied the girl, "Then while

they are all at the wedding, you can tie a basket to it, and let her pull it up."

"Thank you, Blanchette," replied the boy with a nod, "I will do so. But hark, I hear steps along the passage below; I must go on."

Blanchette instantly disappeared; and the boy, unlocking the door of the priest's room, went in. He found Helen de la Tremblade gazing eagerly towards him from the other side of the room, with a look of terror in her eyes, like that of the wounded bird when approached by the retriever. It was changed instantly to joy, however, when she saw the boy, and she ran forward a few steps to meet him. But then the poor girl stopped, and shook her head sadly, exclaiming, "Ah, Philip, you should not have come. You do not know to what you expose yourself. That woman will never forgive any one who shows a kindness to poor Helen de la Tremblade."

"I know she will not, Ma'am'selle Helen," answered the page, setting down the soup upon the table and kissing her hand; "but she sent me to bring you that. But I have much to say to you, and am afraid to stay more than a minute; and I have promised to lock the door too, and take back the key."

"Oh, let me out, Philip! let me out!" exclaimed Helen clasping her hands.

"I cannot! I cannot! even if I had not given my word," cried the boy.

"If I could but see my uncle for one minute," urged Helen, "it might save over many from destruction."

"Impossible now, dear lady," replied Philip, "there are her men at the bottom of the stairs. Your uncle too is confined below—so I have gathered from the talk of Martin and the rest; and I pledged my word also, when she gave me the key; but I did not pledge my word not to contrive to free you afterwards. So listen to me and I will do it."

"Well, speak, speak," said Helen; "what have you to say? I know you are a good kind boy, and wish me well."

"I would give my life to serve you," replied the page. "First, you must not touch that soup. It is poisoned."

Helen shrunk back in horror, exclaiming, "Oh! wretched woman!"

"Next," continued Philip, "here is my dagger. It may be useful to you in case of need; and besides," he added, significantly, "the locks are all on the inside. The blade of the dagger would soon force them back. But do not try it yet, for you will find people in every corner. In half an hour the marriage contract is to be signed—"

"She will never sign it!" cried Helen vehemently. "She will never, never sign it."

"They will use force," answered the boy;

"but at all events they will drag her to the hall, and to the chapel. If I can, I will come under your window the moment they are all in the hall. Look out and speak to me; but if I do not come within three minutes after you hear all quiet in the next room, you can open the door easily with the dagger, and get out. Your uncle is in the room on the left at the foot of the great staircase—the little room with the low door. I am sure he is there, for I have seen Martin and René go in there twice to-day. But if I can, I will fetch the key of his room, and—Hark! Was that some one calling?"

"No, no!" cried Helen; "go on, go on, Philip."

"And then when I come under the window," continued the boy, "I will bring it with a basket of provisions, and throw you up a ball of string, with which you can draw them all up, so keep the window wide open that I may cast it in."

"Oh good, dear boy!" cried Helen.

"I met your friend, Monsieur Estoc," said the page, "this morning, as I was coming back from Chazeul; and I promised him that I would do whatever you or father Walter told me, if it cost me my life. So, you think, dear lady, what I am to do, till you see me under the window, and then tell me quickly, and I will do it, upon my honour."

As he spoke he retreated towards the door; and while opening it, he said, pointing to the soup, "Mind you do not touch it! I was to tell you that I brought it for you myself, out of kindness. They will perhaps want me to do other such deeds; but I cannot, and I will not for any one!"

The last few words were spoken vehemently, with the door open in his hand; and when he had uttered them, he went out, closed, and locked it. Then turning round to descend the stairs, he beheld Madame de Chazeul standing a few steps down, with one of her men a little behind her. The boy's heart sunk, fearing she might have heard too much; but it had happened otherwise. All that had caught her ear was, "I cannot, and will not for any one;" and as he approached she asked, "What was it she wanted you to do, Philip?"

"To let her out," replied the boy readily.

Madame de Chazeul put her hand approvingly upon his shoulder, saying, "You are a good lad—an excellent lad! That is the way I love to be served; and if you behave so, you shall have more advancement than you think of. There's a gold crown for you, Philip.—Did she take the soup?"

"No," answered the page; "and I do not think she will till she is very hungry; for she seemed afraid of something."

"Then she shall be hungry enough,"

muttered Madame de Chazeul. "But come, Philip, give me the key."

The boy delivered it unwillingly, and his mistress proceeded, "Now run, wash your face and hands, and put on your gay satin pourpoint as quick as may be; for the marriage is to take place in ten minutes, and I shall want all my people with me in the hall."

Philip thought to himself, "I will contrive to slip away, however," and proceeded to his own chamber, while Madame de Chazeul retired to put the key by, and then sought her brother the count, to speak with him once more before the last trial of his resolution with Rose d'Albret.

The count was in a different frame of mind, however, from that in which his sister expected to find him. He had employed the time during her absence in working himself up to the necessary pitch of determination, and had, as is not uncommon, gone even beyond the point. He talked loud and high of the privileges and power of guardians, and spoke angrily of those who ventured to oppose them.

"I have always understood, Jacqueline," he said, in a sharp tone, as if the marchioness herself had been one of those who sought to prevent him from exercising his proper authority, "I have always understood, that a guardian stands exactly in the position of a parent; and who ever heard of a daughter daring to object to the man whom her father has chosen for her?"

"Never that I have heard of," replied Madame de Chazeul; "nor of a ward objecting either, when her guardian has provided for her a suitable alliance."

"Never! never!" cried the count vehemently. "I have suffered myself to be set at nought by this girl too long, Jacqueline; and I will do it no longer. Even if I had not sworn as I have, I would not suffer this to go on another hour. The notary has arrived, and the contract is drawn up correctly, except the names.—I will go to her at once.—I have seen Chazeul, too, and spoken to him seriously on his conduct."

"What did he say?" demanded the marchioness, with an eager look. "He was penitent, I am sure."

"Yes," replied the count. "I have nothing to find fault with in his demeanour. He expressed his sorrow for what he had done, assured me that he had never considered it in the light of an insult to me, and that he had no bad intentions at all; but merely wished to speak to Rose in private for a short time, to persuade her to yield calmly to all our wishes this day, as he had every reason to believe, that her inclinations were really not opposed to him, and he knew that, if she did attempt to resist, it would give me pain."

"Persuasions are all in vain, my dear brother," said Madame de Chazeul; "when a woman's vanity is engaged in a particular course, you may argue till you expire without moving her. Firmness is the only thing under such circumstances, and she will at her heart feel obliged to you for forcing her to that, which she does not choose to admit that she wishes. If I were you, I would neither attempt to use any solicitations, nor listen to any replies, but assume at once the tone of authority. Tell her that she must submit, and that you will not suffer her to say one word, in regard to your right of disposing of her hand as you think fit."

"Such is the course I intend to pursue," answered Monsieur de Liancourt. "She has offended me enough by resisting my commands; and, indeed, I do not propose to suffer anything further to be said upon the subject. If she will not sign, I will put the pen in her hand, and guide it by force over the paper. If she says 'no,' at the altar, I will say 'yes' for her. I will not be thwarted and conquered by the obstinacy of my own ward, in my own château."

"Well then, go to her, Anthony," cried the marchioness, who knew well that, as long as this mood lasted, all was secure, and that any opposition on the part of Rose would but drive him to violence, though she had seen such fits in full force in the morning, and pass away before nightfall. "I will wait for you in the hall," she added, "and we will have as many of the people gathered together as possible, to overawe her by the crowd."

"Few or many, it will be the same to me," replied the count; "but yet, the more the better; for I am quite firm and resolute, and am sure that I have every right to do as I am doing. Therefore there cannot be too many witnesses, and I care not who they may be. They shall see me act the part that becomes me, without the slightest wavering or hesitation, for there is nothing so contemptible as a man who suffers himself to be influenced by a little resistance to his authority.—Now, Jacqueline, let us proceed, for the sooner it is done, the less painful will it be;" and thus saying he led the marchioness from the room.

She was now satisfied; for a few hours she could calculate upon her brother's firmness; all those whom she feared were in her power; and the moment of her triumph seemed at hand.

CHAPTER XL.

A GUARDIAN'S POWER.

PARTING with his sister at the bottom of the stairs which led up to the apartments of

Rose d'Albret and the priest, Monsieur de Liancourt mounted in haste. It might be that, as he said, he was anxious to have a painful scene over as speedily as possible; it might be that, like a certain stage hero, of the name of Acres, he began to feel his courage oozing out of the tips of his fingers. It were vain to deny that, ere he came to the first landing, his heart beat quick and his breath began to fail; but finding the man Martin sitting there in an idle attitude, he found an excuse in that fact to pause for an instant, asking his sister's servant, why he did not go and join the rest in the hall, and ordering him to do so.

The man obeyed without reply; for, in the first place, he was tired of his post; in the next place, he never knew how far any one was trusted by the marchioness, so that one indiscreet friend might do much mischief by chattering to another; and, in the third place, he could not well refuse or neglect to obey the orders of Monsieur de Liancourt in his own house.

As soon as he was gone, the count resumed the ascent, and, in a moment or two, reached the door of the anteroom. He gave a gentle knock, and, entering, found Blanchette sitting with a pale cheek, a clouded countenance, and some piece of female apparel lying on her knee, apparently scarcely touched.

"Well, Blanchette," he said, as he went into the room, "is your mistress ready to accompany me?"

"I am sure, sir," replied the maid, "I do not know. I got all her things ready, and told her what Madame de Chazeul said; but she answered me, as bold as a lion, that she would put on no other things than her ordinary clothes, as the idea of forcing her to a ceremony with a man she hates, was quite vain and foolish."

"She shall learn that it is not so," answered the count, in a sharp and angry tone; "whether dressed as becomes a bride, or like a wandering vagrant as she returned hither, she shall be wedded this day, if my name be De Liancourt. Go, tell her I am waiting for her."

The maid went into the inner chamber; and the count could hear the murmur of voices speaking for some moments; but yet Rose d'Albret did not appear.

"She mocks me," he said at length; "she will not even come forth to speak with me. Then I must seek her," and, advancing to the door of her chamber, he entered without ceremony.

Rose was seated at the very farthest part of the room, with her hands clasped over her eyes, and the bitter tears rolling down her cheeks. The moment she heard his step, however, she dried them hastily, rose

from her seat, and, advancing a step or two towards him, cast herself at his feet, clasping his knees.

He felt his resolution begin to waver; but, making an effort, he exclaimed, "How now! how now! No more of this! You know my determination. I announced it to you the day before yesterday; I have solemnly sworn to keep it; and I insist upon obedience."

"Hear me, hear me, sir!" cried Rose; "if you have no pity, if you have no regard for me, hear me for my father's sake, hear me for the memory of your dead friend, and have some compassion on his child."

"It is no use hearing," answered the count; "the matter is determined. It is to be done. Rise, and follow me! I command, I insist."

"Not till you have heard me," answered Rose; "that, at least, I may require. Would you, Monsieur de Liancourt, not only break your contract with my father, by which my hand was promised to Louis de Montigni—"

"Pshaw! that contract, if it referred to him at all, is at an end by his death," cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "talk not to me of that any more."

"But he lives, he lives!" exclaimed Rose, vehemently. "You have been deceived, indeed you have, by the tale they invented to deceive me; and I have more wrongs, more deceptions to tell you of, from which I know your noble mind will shrink with horror—schemes which none but the basest of men could conceive or execute."

"It is all in vain, Rose, it is all in vain," answered the count. "Nothing you can say will make the least difference. I know all that has taken place; Chazeul's folly, which has compromised your character, and all the rest. But he is sorry for it, is willing to do all that is right to justify your fame, by wedding you this moment, and—"

"Is willing, you mean to say, sir," cried Rose, "to profit by his villiany, to gain the very object he had in view, by the very means he employed. Why did he come here, but to injure my reputation, with the hope of forcing me to marry him, and inducing you to drive me to such a course? But I heard it all beforehand and escaped the snare. Helen de la Tremblade was sent by good father Walter to tell me of the base treachery, to warn me of my danger, and show me the means of escaping from it."

"She came here because she wants to marry him herself," replied the count. "Once more I say, Mademoiselle d'Albret, I command you, as your guardian, to rise and follow me, without further words, to give your hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, for whom I have long destined you, and to forget

Louis de Montigni, who misled you to quit this house, and has since paid for some other imprudence with his life."

"He is living! Indeed, indeed, he is living!" cried Rose. "Give me but an hour and a patient hearing, and I will show you, sir, that he is living, and that it is you who have been deceived, not I."

"Thank God! I am not so easily deceived, Mademoiselle d'Albret," replied the count. "I cannot grant your request. The contract lies ready for signature; every one is waiting for you in the hall; they cannot be disappointed; my word shall not be broken, and I insist that this vain, this stupid, resistance cease instantly."

"The contract may lie there, sir, for ever," replied Rose, rising, and seating herself again. "I will never sign it, so help me, God! You refuse to hear reason and truth; you listen to falsehood and wrong; you may kill me, place me in a convent, do aught with me you like; but make me the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul, of so base, so bad, so contemptible a being, you never shall, while I have breath."

"Now, listen to me, Rose d'Albret," replied the count, advancing angrily towards her. "I am your guardian; am I not? You are my ward; is it not so? By the power given me by the law, I have promised your hand to Nicholas de Chazeul—"

"In violation of the contract from which your only power is derived," replied Rose. "That contract, in which you are named my guardian, promises my hand to De Montigni."

"The girl will drive me mad!" exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt. "Once more I tell you he is dead; and if you refuse yourself to sign the marriage contract, I will sign it for you. Rise, and come with me without another word, or you will compel me to force you."

"Never!" answered Rose. "Louis de Montigni is not dead. I have offered to prove it to you; but you will not even hear in what the proof consists, although you know that, until he has resigned his claim to the succession of De Liancourt, not even a doubt can exist that he is the person specified in the contract."

The count seemed not shaken—no, not in the least—but embarrassed; for his own doubts of De Montigni's death were strong upon the side of Rose d'Albret; and the certainty that, if his nephew still lived, he was committing a gross violation of the contract with her father, left him but little to say in his own defence. He was not shaken, for he had before made up his mind to overleap his own doubts upon that score, to take advantage of the bare report which had reached him, in order to justify the course to which

he had been led by others, and resolutely to believe that report true, in despite of all that could be said to prove it false. The combat of weak people is with themselves, more than with any external things. They wish to convince themselves they are acting right, while they know they are acting wrong; and their labours for that object are not light. But Monsieur de Liancourt had no reply ready, no reason to assign for not listening to the proofs Rose offered, and he paused, for a full minute, in painful hesitation as to what he should say.

"This is all an artifice to gain time," he answered at length, "and I will not yield to it. It is ascertained, beyond all doubt, that Louis de Montigni is no more, and has justly paid for insulting a prince like the Duke of Nemours."

"Oh! sir," cried Rose, in a tone of mingled indignation and grief, "how can you suffer your own nature to be thus changed by the base counsels of others, so to speak of your sister's son? He is not dead! he will yet live to shame those who calumniate him. Were he indeed laid in the tomb, I still say, nothing should ever lead me to marry Nicholas de Chazeul; but, as long as Louis de Montigni lives, I shall regard him as my husband. Show me that he is indeed gone, and I am willing to resign everything that this man really covets—my wealth, my lands—and to retire to a life of seclusion and prayer; but I am not willing, and never shall I be willing, to wed one whom I so much despise and abhor."

"You will have no choice," replied the count. "You shall be his wife this day ere noon. These are all evasions and affectations.—I know right well which way your mind inclines. You would save your credit, Rose, appear reluctant, and only yield to force; but force shall not be wanting, and perhaps more than you expect or like.—Yes, you may weep!—We are prepared for such things; but you had better dry your eyes; and, as you must appear before a large assembly of witnesses, look your best."

"Sir, you are ungenerous and unkind," replied Rose d'Albret; "but I know whence your impulses are derived; and shame upon them who fill a noble mind with such base suspicions. Use what force you like; the power has not yet appeared on earth that shall make my hand or my tongue so belie my heart, as to promise aught like love, attachment, or obedience, towards Nicholas de Chazeul."

"Oh, is it so?" exclaimed the count. "This is carrying the matter too far, Mademoiselle d'Albret. Will you, or will you not, accompany me, in obedience to my commands, quietly and decently?"

Rose was silent; her mind agitated with

many conflicting thoughts. She feared to yield the least point, lest it should be accepted as a promise of farther compliance; and yet she naturally shrunk, with all a woman's timidity, from driving those who oppressed her to have recourse to violence.—She dreaded the moment when it was to begin; she would fain have procrastinated: every minute seemed something gained ere the actual struggle commenced.

She was silent; but, after waiting a few moments, the count seized her by the wrist, exclaiming, "Come, I insist.—Not one moment more!"

"Well, sir, well," cried Rose d'Albret, trying to withdraw her hand, "I will go with you to the hall: but remember, it is but to refuse most resolutely to do that which would be equally against my duty and my heart."

"Duty!" cried the count with a scoff, unloosing her arm. "Talk not of duty after all that you have done! As to the course you intend to pursue, be it what it may, mine is determined. We shall see what is your conduct, and I will answer for it, I will match it.—Go on, mademoiselle. You know your way to the hall, I think."

With a slow step and trembling limbs, Rose d'Albret proceeded through the ante-room, and down the stairs. She felt at every moment as if she should faint; but yet, remembering that if such a weakness overcame her, they might take advantage of her insensibility, to proceed rapidly in whatever course they thought fit, she nerved her heart to the best of her power, and paused for a moment before entering the hall, to make one more appeal to the Count de Liancourt.

But he would not hear her speak, and throwing open the door violently, he waved her to go in.

All seemed confusion and dim indistinctness to her sight. There was a crowd of faces, some of which appeared strange, and some familiar; but they were almost all those of men. There was wine, and meat, and laughter, and flowers, and everything the most dissonant to all the feelings of her heart; while, through the whole mass of misty images was seen, in terrible prominence, like some colossal statue in an Eastern temple, the tall rigid form, and stern sarcastic features of Madame de Chazeul.

She was leaning upon a table just opposite the door; her complexion, where not besmeared with rouge, was unusually pale; there was an expression of weariness, and even of pain in her face. But when Rose appeared, that harsh countenance lighted up with a look of scornful triumph; and the poor girl's eyes grew dim, her head turned giddy with the thought of all she was to encounter in that hall.

CHAPTER XLI.

HELEN AND THE PAGE.

HELEN DE LA TREMBLADE sat alone in the priest's room; and sad and terrible were the thoughts that crossed her mind. It may seem that to have found one even out of many, though but a mere boy, sincerely attached, and willing to risk all and sacrifice all, for her happiness and deliverance, might well have brought cheering consolation to her heart. *He* could have no concealed motive. *He* had no dark treachery to practise. There, in his young enthusiasm, he had stood before her, a friend indeed. But what was the errand on which he had been sent?—the errand which he had refused to fulfil?—To bear her poison!—to consign her to the grave at the mandate of one who had promised with specious and sweet-spoken words, to guard, protect, cherish, watch over her.—To consign her to the dark and silent grave! Such had been the command of the Marchioness de Chazeul, after having neglected, abandoned, ill-treated her.

There were glimpses of some of the darkest realities of earth breaking on the mind of one who had lived her youth as in a dream; and oh, how cold, and more cold, grew her heart, as proof after proof was given of what human beings can become, when Godless, and heartless, they give themselves up to the mastery of strong passion. It was more than even the kindness of the poor boy could compensate, though she had found some relief in every word he spoke.

She sat and gazed upon the poisoned drink, with thoughts, almost approaching to madness, flashing through her brain. She asked herself, "Shall I drink it?—Then pain, and anguish, and remorse, and shame, will be all over. I shall be delivered from all this weight, this intolerable burden. I shall be free.—They cannot say I did it.—It is no fault of mine. They sent it to me. They are murderers, not I.—Oh, how I long to be at rest!—But Rose, dear, good Rose,—I must not leave her to struggle on unaided. And yet it were a pleasant thing to die; but for the terrible world beyond the grave.—Oh no, I must not, dare not, die, with all my sins upon my head. I must have time for penitence and prayer.—The boy said he would soon be here. I will see," and opening the window, she looked down to the bottom of the deep corridor, or passage, between the château and the walls.

There was nobody there, however. All was solitary; and even on the ramparts, the scanty watch had dwindled away to nothing; every one who dared, hurrying away to witness the gay wedding of Mademoiselle d'Albret, and all making their own comments

upon the decency and propriety which their noble lord and master displayed in burying his brother, and marrying his nephew on the selfsame morning.

The eye of Helen de la Tremblade ran along the wall towards the chapel, in which she had found her uncle, on her first arrival, not many hours before; and she examined every prominent point, attentively. First came a large mass of masonry containing some of the best rooms in the château, projecting from the rest of the building; then appeared a round tower with a turret fastened to its side; and then the roof of the chapel, built against the walls, was seen with part of one window, peeping out from behind the tower. But all the way down, neither on the walls, nor between them and the château, could Helen descry any one.

As her eye strayed casually, however, to some low trees and bushes, which ran down the slope in the neighbourhood of the chapel, she thought she saw something move amongst the grey branches, but could not distinguish what; and, as she was gazing more eagerly to trace the object as it proceeded, she heard high tones speaking in the adjacent room; and turned to listen. She recognised the voices of Monsieur de Liancourt and Rose d'Albret; but she could not catch the words that were uttered, though some of them were spoken loud and in apparent anger.

"He has come to take her," said Helen to herself, "and she will not go.—Oh, that I could aid her!"

Her first impulse was to approach nearer the door, in order to push back the lock with the dagger which the boy had left with her; but then she reflected, that singly, she could do nothing to prevent the count from dragging poor Rose to the altar.

"No! she said, re-seating herself near the window, and a look of dark and gloomy determination coming over her face. "No! I will let them take her away,—and then I will confront them all.—Ay, in the hall, amidst menials and soldiers and friends; and they shall hear truth.—Hark, how loud he speaks! He is threatening her.—Poor Rose! 'Tis all silent now—she must be gone!—Hark, the door bangs to!—They have dragged her away. Now, boy, now; for I must follow soon."

She ran hastily to the window again, and gazed out. The page was not yet there; and Helen hesitated whether to wait or hurry away to the hall.

At that moment, the sound of a hunting horn reached her ear, and she looked up from the passage between the walls, on which her eyes had been bent, to the undulating country straight before her, beyond the defences of the château. There was a large party of horsemen issuing from the nearest wood,

distant about half a mile; and Helen, with her quick fancy, cried, "It may be De Montigni!"

But just then, from the bushes beyond the chapel, a man on foot darted forth, and ran round, as if he perceived her at the window. She instantly recognised Estoc, and stretched her head farther forward, in order that he might certainly see her. The old soldier paused immediately opposite, and came as near to the wall as he could, without losing sight of her; and then he raised his voice, and pointed with his hand to the party of horsemen—still advancing.

But the distance rendered most of his words indistinct, and Helen caught only the few last, "—The postern a little to your right—before they can arrive; for they have barred us out by the chapel," was all that she could distinguish.

"Then these are enemies coming," she thought; "and all depends upon Estoc getting in first."

She tried to make him hear in vain; her weaker voice was lost in air; but just as she was about to withdraw, force back the lock, run down and open the postern, she saw the figure of the page coming round the square tower. He had a heavy basket on his arm, and was proceeding, with his eyes cast down, to wind up with boyish habits, a quantity of string upon a piece of wood; but Helen called aloud, "Philip! Philip!"

The boy looked up. "Run round, without a moment's delay," cried Helen, "and open the first postern to the west; show yourself beyond, and you will find Estoc.—Run, Philip, run, if you would save us all."

The boy threw down the basket, and sped forward as rapidly as possible. Helen saw the postern unlocked and pushed open: and then withdrawing from the window, she murmured, "Now then, to stop them till help arrives! I will at least do that, if it cost my life or that of others.—He said my uncle was in the room at the bottom of the great staircase. Perhaps I can set him free too;" and, hastening to the door which led out at once at the top of the stairs, she easily forced back the lock with the well-tempered blade of the boy's poniard, and threw it open. She started, however, on seeing the maid, Blanchette, straight before her; but resolved to pass at all risks, she grasped the dagger firmly in her hand, and gazed upon the girl's countenance for an instant.

It was as pale as death; but Blanchette, seeing her thus pause and look at her, exclaimed, "Pass on, Mademoiselle Helen—pass on to the hall. You may see things there that you do not expect. I won't stop you."

"Woe to those who try!" vehemently cried Helen; and darting on without another

word, she descended that flight of stairs, and passed through the corridor below. An old man met her as she went, but started back as if she had been a spectre; and Helen hurried forward, reached the foot of the great staircase, and rushed towards the chamber, which the boy had mentioned as her uncle's place of confinement.

The door was locked, and the key had been taken out; the lock too was in the inside. Helen shook the door wildly, and exclaimed, "Are you there? Are you there?"

"I am," replied the voice of her uncle from within. "Is that you, Helen?"

"Yes," cried the girl, "how can I let you out quickly?"

"Run up the passage," cried the priest, "and take the key out of the last door on the right hand. It fits this lock."

Helen flew rather than ran, returned with the key, unlocked the door, and threw it open.

"Quick, quick!" she cried. "There is not a minute to spare. They are now forcing her to the marriage; but I will confront them all. I will stop them or die!" and with her whole frame thrilling with excitement, her eyes flashing with unnatural light, and the wildness almost of insanity in her look, she darted away, up the great staircase, through the corridor at the top, and reached the door of the hall. Before it stood the man Martin, who as soon as he beheld her, exclaimed, "Ah, Mademoiselle Helen! you cannot pass here."

"Stand back, or I will stab you to the heart!" exclaimed Helen, raising the dagger; and as he retreated a step to avoid the blow that seemed ready to descend, she darted forward, and, before he could stop her, was in the midst of the hall.

CHAPTER XLII.

TAKEN IN HER OWN SNARE.

ALL had been prepared in the great hall of the Château de Marzay for the marriage of Rose d'Albret with Nicholas de Chazeul, as far as the time and circumstances would admit. A few of such flowers, as the early season of the year afforded, had been gathered to strew the floor, or to form into nosegays. Various old banners and decorations had been brought forth, to give an appearance of splendour and gaiety to the scene; and if friends and relations had not been summoned to honour the occasion, their places were filled up by the servants and attendants of the family, dressed in their best attire. All Madame de Chazeul's maids were there, all the women-servants of the

château, with the sole exception of Blanchette, who, as the reader knows, had remained in her mistress's apartments.

But the principal group in the room was stationed near the table, in the midst, on which lay the contract of marriage, neatly tied with white riband, and surrounded by a chaplet of violets and snow-drops. That group consisted of the young Marquis de Chazeul, dressed in all the most extravagant finery of that extravagant day, of the marchioness his mother, and the notary public of the Holy Roman Empire, who, called upon continually to deal with great people, was conversing familiarly with his two companions, and giving them his advice how to proceed in certain cases, which they had suggested for his consideration.

When first Madame de Chazeul had entered the room, she was followed by her page; but in the conversation which succeeded, between herself, the notary, and her son, she did not remark that the boy slipped away quietly and quitted the hall, without attracting the attention of any one.

The reader will have the kindness to remember that, as I described this hall at first it might be entered by three different doors; the one communicating with the great staircase, by means of a short corridor with deep windows at the south end; another leading, by a separate passage, to the apartments of the Count de Liancourt, and to those which Rose d'Albret had formerly occupied; and the third on the western side, giving exit to the walls, by the little flying bridge, which we have more than once already mentioned.

As it was the door on the north by which Rose d'Albret and the count were expected to enter, the eyes of the whole party were turned, from time to time, in that direction; but yet, for more than a quarter of an hour after the Marchioness de Chazeul had entered, no one else appeared; and she herself seemed to be, as probably she really was, somewhat anxious and impatient of the long delay which took place. Every one remarked that her face looked pale, notwithstanding her rouge, and that a sort of sharp and irritable twitching about the muscles of the mouth and nostrils displayed itself in a manner which none of them had ever seen before.

At the end of that quarter of an hour, she advanced to the table at the further side of the hall, where various refreshments had been set out, and drank a quantity of water and some wine. Then she sat down; and then she rose again; and then advancing to her son, she whispered, "How long they are! I fear your uncle has been fool enough to let her argue with him, instead of stopping her at once."

But just as she spoke, the door was thrown sharply open, and the Count de Liancourt himself appeared, accompanied by poor Rose d'Albret. She was as pale as death; and before she entered she paused, and put her hand twice to her head, as if her brain grew giddy; but Monsieur de Liancourt took her by the arm, not quite as gently as might be, and led her into the hall. All parties made way, and formed a circle round the table, on which the contract lay, leaving sufficient space for the principal parties to advance and sign the document.

"I am faint," said Rose, as the count hurried on; "give me some water."

"Give her some water, give her some water," cried the count. "Mademoiselle d'Albret is somewhat faint."

Chazeul instantly sprang to the other table, and fetched a cup of water; but when he brought it, Rose put it aside, with a look of disgust, replying, "Not from your hand!" and, seeming to recover strength and courage from the effort, she took a step forward as if towards the table.

The notary immediately advanced with the pen in his hand, saying, "The contract has been read, mademoiselle, by your guardian, Monsieur de Liancourt, on your part, and by Monsieur de Chazeul on his own. It is, therefore, doubtless, unnecessary to read it over to you yourself, as they are quite satisfied."

"Oh! quite unnecessary," cried the count. "Point out where she is to sign."

"Stay a moment," cried Rose d'Albret; "I told you, sir, before I came hither, that I did not intend to sign this paper—that nothing shall ever induce me to sign it: and my only object in appearing here now, is to protest before all these witnesses, that I will never be the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul."

Looks of surprise passed round the greater part of the crowd; and many of them whispered to their neighbour, inquiring what would be done next, while Madame de Chazeul stepped forward with a flashing eye, and a quivering lip, to say something in a low tone to her brother, and Nicholas de Chazeul, stretching out his tall form to its full height, tossed back his head with a look of scornful indignation.

"What says Monsieur de Liancourt?" said the notary, who had received his instructions from the marchioness. "Does he admit of this protest? for the lady, I conceive, must act by her guardian."

"No, I do not admit it," cried the count. "I insist that the marriage go forward. Is it competent for me to sign on her behalf?"

The notary hesitated. "No," he said, at length; "I think we must have her signature."

"That you shall never have," replied Rose. "I would rather cut off my hand."

"I would pass over ceremonies, sir, if I were you," said the notary, speaking to the count in a whisper. "The lady's hand can be guided over the paper."

"It shall be done," replied the count; and Madame de Chazeul beckoned up one of her men, saying in an under voice to her brother, "do it suddenly, and it will be over before she is aware."

"In the first place," rejoined the notary, in the same tone, "to make it all formally right, we had better inquire whether there be any one who wishes to take act of opposition to the marriage. You are sure of all in the hall, I suppose?"

The marchioness nodded her head; and the notary proceeded to demand, in a louder voice, if there was any one who had any lawful cause of opposition to the marriage, between Nicholas, Marquis de Chazeul, and Rose Demoiselle d'Albret.

There was a sudden noise at the other side of the hall, even while he was speaking, and the moment after he had ceased, a voice, sweet and melancholy though clear and firm, exclaimed, "I have;" and, as the crowd broke away, and turned towards the spot whence the sounds issued, Helen de la Tremblade advanced, and stood directly opposite the Marquis de Chazeul and his mother.

Chazeul turned first as red as fire, and then as pale as ashes; and the marchioness stood by his side, not with the rage and vehemence which might have been supposed, not with the ready command of resources and the power, as well as the will, to bear down opposition, but with her teeth chattering, her face pale, her lips white, and her limbs trembling.

"I feel ill," she said, "I feel ill. I must have taken the wrong cup.—Chazeul, I feel ill."

But none attended to her; for the notary had turned to Helen de la Tremblade, and was inquiring in a formal but scornful tone, what were the grounds of her opposition, when another voice was heard, exclaiming, "These!" and father Walter strode forward and took her by the hand, holding forth an open letter, "These are the grounds of her opposition," he said, "inasmuch as she is contracted with Monsieur de Chazeul, *par paroles de futur.*"

The notary turned and looked to Monsieur de Liancourt, who exclaimed, in a furious tone, "They are all in a conspiracy to stop the marriage. I will have it go forward as I have sworn."

"You can pass over this objection, sir," said the notary. "If it be at all valid, it may be pleaded hereafter in nullification."

"Well, then, pass it over," cried the count.

"Will you sign, Mademoiselle d'Albret?"

"Never!" answered Rose, firmly,

"Never! so help me God!"

"Then thus I will make you," muttered Monsieur de Liancourt; and, seizing her suddenly by the wrist, he dragged her forward to the table; and while the man, René, stood behind to prevent her escape, he placed the pen partly in her hand, partly held it in his own, and was actually running it over the paper, before Rose was well aware of what he was doing.

"I protest, in the name of God, and the Holy Catholic Church, against this violent and outrageous act!" exclaimed Walter de la Tremblade, lifting up his hands to Heaven.

"Hold!" cried a voice of thunder at the same moment; and, striding forward through the crowd, a stout short man, with a grey beard and hair, dressed in a plain suit of russet brown, advanced to the table, and struck the pen out of Monsieur de Liancourt's hand, exclaiming, "Hold! Hear a word or two first—Parbleu! you make quick work of it!"

The count laid his hand upon his sword, demanding fiercely, "Who are you, insolent villain?"

"Why, this is that man, Chasseron," cried Chazeul. "What have you to do with this affair, sir?"

"Why, Ventre Saint Gris! I oppose the marriage," cried Chasseron, "as the lady's cousin."

"Her cousin!" exclaimed Chazeul, bursting into a scornful laugh. "Who ever heard of you before?"

"That will not avail, unless you can prove your relationship," exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, looking to the notary.

But that worthy officer was gazing down upon the ground, somewhat pale in the face; and Chasseron, in his bluff way, replied, "Will that not do?—Pardi, then, this will!" and, drawing his sword, he laid it naked upon the table. Then, taking up the contract of marriage, he tore it to atoms.

Chazeul sprang towards him with fury in his countenance. But the notary darted in between, holding up both his hands, and exclaiming, "The king! the king!"

"The king!" cried Chazeul, staggering back.

"The king!" exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, gazing upon him.

"The king! the king!" cried many voices in the hall; and at least one half added, "Vive Henri Quatre!"

"Even so, my good friends," said Henry. "Monsieur de Liancourt, you will excuse me for taking such liberties in your château. I have been obliged to make it my halting-place this morning, with about a couple of

hundred of my friends, who have just been hunting with me in these woods. But we shall all depart before night, and leave you in full possession of your own again, as I came with no hostile intention, but merely to do a little act of justice. And now, my fair cousin," he continued, turning to Rose d'Albret, "you must prepare for a journey to-night, for we intend to take you with us."

"My lord the king," said the Count de Liancourt, assuming a tone of dignity for a last effort. "I have to beg that, whatever you do, you would abstain from meddling with the arrangements of my family."

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Henry, "what would the man have? Without, there!—Send in the captain of the guard and a file of soldiers. Either as a friend or an enemy, Monsieur de Liancourt—either as a good and obedient subject, or a rebel against his king!—You shall act which character you please, and I will behave accordingly. In the meantime, sir, this lady is no longer your ward; for, let me tell you, that you have attempted to violate the contract with her father, by means—of which the less we say the better. It shall be my task to carry that contract into execution. Ha! the guard!—Attach Monsieur de Chazeul for high treason—But! what have we got here?" he continued, looking to a spot a little behind the count, where the servants of Madame de Chazeul had placed her in a chair and gathered round her. "A dead woman, I think!—By my life! my old acquaintance, Jacqueline de Chazeul!"

"Good God, my mother!" exclaimed Chazeul, darting towards her; but the hand that he took was cold and inanimate; and "the poisoned chalice" she had prepared for others, had worked too certainly upon herself.

At first it was supposed she did but faint; but the truth was soon ascertained; and when Chazeul rose from his knee, and turned round to the rest of the party, he beheld what was to him a more painful sight than even that on which he had been just gazing. It was Rose d'Albret in the arms of Louis de Montigni; while Monsieur de Liancourt,

with all his assumed firmness gone, was apparently making amends to the king by courtesy and explanation, for the tone which he had at first assumed towards him.

But in another part of the hall stood Helen de la Tremblade, with her hand in that of her uncle, while her eyes were buried on the old man's shoulder; and around,—at each door of the hall, and filling up the whole of one side,—were seen the scarred and weather-beaten faces of the veteran royalist soldiery, with their white scarfs over their shoulders, and their naked swords in their hand.

Chazeul turned again to the form of his dead mother, and then once more bent his eye on Helen de la Tremblade. "It is the hand of God!" he murmured. "It is the hand of God!" and then, as the captain of the guard advanced to arrest him, he said, "Wait one moment," and strode across the room towards the priest and his niece.

"Helen," he said in a low tone, "Helen, I have done you wrong.—I am ready to make atonement.—Will you be my wife?"

"No!" cried Helen, turning round towards him, "No!—My fate is fixed. The cloister is the only shelter for one whose heart has been trampled on like mine."

"Nay, nay!" cried Henri Quatre, stepping forward. "Remember, my fair friend, penitence should be always accepted. Were it not so, how should I ever find grace, as I yet hope to do?—Nay, suffer me to be the mediator. Here, Monsieur de Chazeul," he continued, taking Helen's hand, and placing it in that of the marquis. "Take her; and if she have loved you too well heretofore, it is a thousand chances to one that you soon teach her to mend that fault, when you are her husband.—However, you shall have fair room to try; for we must not cage so promising a bridegroom. Captain, we shall not want your good offices for the present."

The augury of the king was unhappily but too correct; and two years had barely elapsed, when Helen, Marchioness of Chazeul, retired for ever from the busy world, with the consent of her husband, to the convent of a sisterhood of cloistered nuns.

THE END.

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